

Blair rallies troops in surprise visit to Iraq

BASRA (IRAQ), DEC. 21. Protected by U.S. Black Hawk helicopters, the British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, flew into Iraq today in a surprise show of political bravado designed to boost prospects for Iraqi elections and cheer the U.K. troops before Christmas.

His trip also sent a defiant message back home where Britons' disquiet over Iraq is likely to reduce the margin of his expected general election victory next year.

While a year ago, his U.S. ally, George W. Bush, stayed at Baghdad airport, Mr. Blair went straight into the central Green Zone, a favourite target for insurgents, on a military Puma helicopter.

"We stand on the side of the democrats against the terrorists ... Whatever people felt about the original conflict, we the British aren't a nation of quitters," he said in a joint news conference with the Iraqi Prime Minister, Iyad Allawi.

Once housing Saddam Hussein's presidential palace, the heavily-fortified Green Zone compound now houses Mr. Allawi's offices as well as the U.S.



The British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, is helped down a tank in Basra, Iraq, on Tuesday. — AFP

and U.K. embassies.

After his first-ever visit to Baghdad, Mr. Blair later flew

south to the British-run Basra zone to meet troops.

He said that those behind the that the Iraqi people here are

not going to quit on this task either. They're going to see it through," he told reporters at the Baghdad news conference. Mr. Blair and Mr. Allawi said that the January 30 poll would go ahead, despite an upsurge in bloodshed that included Sunday's killing of three Iraqi Electoral Commission officials and Monday's twin suicide car bombings that killed 66 people.

"Our enemies ... will not prevail," Mr. Allawi said.

'Heroes of new Iraq'

Mr. Blair met top U.S. officials in Baghdad, but was most struck by Iraqi Election Commission members. "I said to them I thought they were the heroes of the new Iraq that's being created, because here are people risking their lives every day," he said.

Mr. Blair acknowledged the difficulty in stemming violence. "Everyone understands there will be violence that continues after the elections," he said. "I hope the election will have its own impetus toward greater security."

Mortars typically strike the

Green Zone area several times a week. "You can feel the sense of danger people live in here," he said, asked about his feelings on flying in.

Mr. Blair's aides swore journalists to secrecy ahead of each stage of the trip.

Mr. Allawi praised London for its involvement in Iraq, hailing the "brave soldiers of Britain."

London sent about 45,000 troops to join the U.S.-led March 2003 invasion in its biggest deployment since the Korean War half a century ago. It has since scaled that down to about 8,500, almost all in the southern zone around Basra.

"You can be very proud of the job you are doing," Mr. Blair said as he shook hands and chatted with soldiers. Sporadic cheers from British soldiers greeted Mr. Blair, with no repeat of the public complaints that embarrassed the U.S. Defence Secretary, Donald Rumsfeld, on his recent trip to see American troops.

Mr. Blair apologised to those missing loved ones at Christmas, but added: "My God, it's a job worth doing." — Reuters

Blair turns down Musharraf plea

Press Trust of India

LONDON, Dec. 6. — Brushing aside Pakistan President Gen. Pervez Musharraf's plea for a British "role" in resolving Kashmir, British Prime Minister Mr Tony Blair said today that both India and Pakistan should be supported to sort out the problem between themselves. "I think it (Britain's involvement) is not possible. It is time to give every support to India and Pakistan to try and resolve the problem (between themselves)," he said at a joint press conference with Gen. Musharraf after their talks.

He was replying to a question on Gen. Musharraf's plea for Britain to mediate in the Kashmir issue which is now being bilaterally discussed between the two countries.

Earlier, despite India's rejection of third party intervention, the Pakistan President had said that he would like Britain to play a role in negotiations with India in resolving the Kashmir dispute. "I would love Britain to play a role as an intermediary in resolving the Kashmir dispute," he said in an interview published today, during his two-day official visit to the UK. "British help behind the scenes will keep up the pressure," he said.

Gen. Musharraf said



At 10 Downing Street on Monday. — AFP

that for 30 years India and Pakistan had agreed to "strict" bilateral negotiations. And until last year this had yielded little, but he was "very hopeful" that both sides were now able to move forward.

The President said he had found Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh "very sincere and genuine". But "when you are talking of such intractable disputes as Kashmir, more than sincerity is needed," he added. "It requires flexibility of mind and courage to go for a solution."

About India's decision to reduce troops in Jammu and Kashmir, he said: "It is

a good gesture, and good optics, but only tactical."

Gen. Musharraf claimed that Pakistan had destroyed about 600 Al-Qaida terrorists in its cities. He said the West's obsession with capturing Osama bin Laden meant that the scale and success of the Pakistani operation was misunderstood.

He also said that he told US President George W Bush that a key to wiping out terrorism worldwide was to resolve the Palestinian question. "I know him by now," he said of President Bush. "I think he wants to resolve the Palestinian-Israeli question. I sense urgency in him."

07 DEC 2004

THE STATESMAN

Blair impeach bid launched

London, Nov. 24 (Reuters): Parliamentarians and celebrity campaigners launched a bid today to impeach Tony Blair for "gross misconduct" over his justification for the Iraq war.

The impeachment move, a symbolic parliamentary process rather than a realistic proposition in Blair's case, is the first since the mid-19th century. Its supporters, including well-known figures like novelist Frederick Forsyth and actor Corin Redgrave, want to punish Blair for allegedly misleading the country over the threat from Iraq's weapons of mass destruction.

With only 23 lawmakers backing an impeachment motion in parliament, Blair can rest assured he will not face the ultimate sanction of removal from office but it could embarrass a prime minister who remains vulnerable to events in Iraq.

"This is born out of the frustration of many parliamentarians that we simply cannot hold the prime minister to account in any other way," said Jenny Tonge, member of parliament for the Opposition Liberal Democrats.

"It doesn't matter where it goes. The important thing is to show we're trying," she said.

The motion calls for a select parliamentary committee to be established to examine Blair's conduct on Iraq and to report back within 48 days on whether there are grounds to impeach him.

Blair's Labour Party has a

majority of more than 150 seats in the House of Commons. No Labour MPs have signed the motion although its backers say some in Labour secretly support it.

The MPs from various Opposition parties hope to force a debate in parliament over Blair's pre-war assertion that Iraq's banned weapons posed a threat. No weapons of mass destruction have been found.

More MPs would likely have to back the motion for a debate to proceed.

Blair has been harangued over the war and his public trust and popularity ratings have plunged, although he remains well on track to win the next election, expected in May.



Tony Blair in London. (Reuters)

25 NOV 2004

THE TELEGRAPH

Security thwarted 9/11-style attack on London, Heathrow

Britain got tip-off from Pakistani officials

Associated Press
London, November 23

BRITISH SECURITY services thwarted planned September 11-style terror attacks on Heathrow Airport and skyscrapers in Canary Wharf, a financial district of London, according to two media reports.

But the stories, which cited unidentified sources, did not say when or where the plots were uncovered, or how close they came to being carried out.

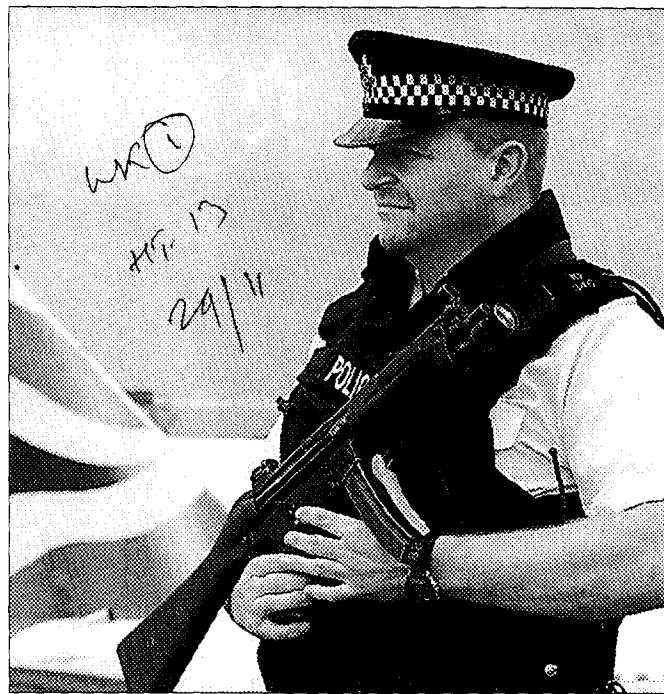
The plans to crash planes into the two targets were among four or five attacks planned by terrorists linked to Osama bin Laden's al-Qaida network, the ITV News said on Monday night and the *Daily Mail* newspaper reported in its Tuesday editions.

ITV News also said that British authorities had disrupted training programmes for suicide pilots. Officials at Britain's Home Office and Metropolitan Police in London refused to comment. A spokesman at Prime Minister Tony Blair's Downing Street office said: "We never comment on security matters."

A year and a half ago, British troops in armoured vehicles surrounded Heathrow Airport. Blair's government said that the action came in response to specific intelligence.

Last summer, Pakistan gave British officials intelligence suggesting that al-Qaida had plotted to attack Heathrow airport. The information was found on the computers of two accused members of al-Qaida arrested in Pakistan. The computers held images of Heathrow.

On November 8, the head of the MI5, Eliza Manningham-Buller, said that counterterrorism efforts have helped to prevent attacks in Britain since the September 11, 2001, but she offered no details.



An armed policeman guards Heathrow Airport.

Terror update

Three foreign UN workers held hostage in Afghanistan were freed unharmed on Tuesday, almost four weeks after they were abducted at gunpoint on the streets of the capital Kabul. Interior Minister Ali Ahmad Jalali said Annetta Flanigan from Northern Ireland, Kosovan Shqipe Hebibi and Filipino diplomat Angelito Nayan were "abandoned" early in the morning at an unidentified location in Kabul. He denied any deal had been done to free them.

Indonesian police have arrested a man they believe played a key role in September's car-bombing that killed 10 people outside the Australian embassy in Jakarta. Kompas, Indonesia's leading newspaper, reported that Iwan Darmawan, alias Rois, was arrested two weeks ago in the west of the island of Java.

24 NOV 2004

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

Blair to defend backing Bush

The Times, London



Mr Tony Blair with President Bush at a recent press meet in Washington. — AFP

LONDON, Nov. 14. — UK Prime Minister Mr Tony Blair is expected tomorrow to make a robust defence of intervention in failing countries against critics who accuse him of following Mr George Bush's aggressive "neoconservative" policies.

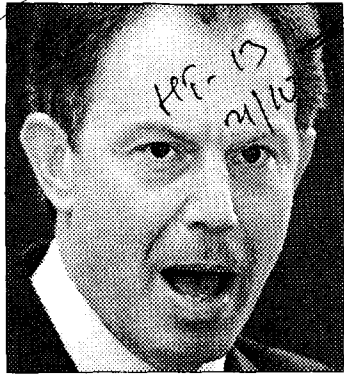
The Prime Minister will use a speech at Mansion House in London to attack those, including members of his own party, who fear he has fallen under the spell of the US President and his aggressive foreign policy. Mr Blair, fresh from a trip to Washington which gave momentum to the West Asia peace process, will insist that Mr Bush's proactive promotion of democracy abroad is also a "progressive Left" agenda.

He believes that former

foreign policy assumptions which turned a blind eye to the internal horrors of dictatorships are no longer acceptable. Mr Blair will say that public opinion in Iraq is strongly behind a new democratic state and against a return to tyranny. But he still faces suspicion from some of his own MPs about the real motives of the US in establishing democracies in Afghanistan and Iraq while unelected regimes are tolerated elsewhere in West Asia and Africa.

Mr Blair is also expected to rebut claims that Labour will fight an election campaign based on an exaggerated climate of fear from terrorism. Mr David Blunkett, the home secretary, denied yesterday that the government was hyping security fears nationally and internationally.

He said on BBC One's Politics Show: "You do not have to invent antisocial behaviour, you do not have to invent fear of walking down the street late at night, you do not have to invent fear of terrorism, you just have to live it and see it, and feel it." In his speech tomorrow Mr Blair will again emphasise the importance of Britain's relationship with the US. But after securing the agreement of Mr Bush to visit Europe and Britain in the New Year, he will put equal weight on strengthening links between the US and the European Union.



Blair faces revolt over US request for troops

Associated Press
London, October 20

BRITISH PRIME Minister Tony Blair faced a revolt by lawmakers today over a US request to re-deploy some British troops closer to Baghdad.

Forty-five lawmakers, including 44 members of the governing Labour Party, have signed a motion insisting the House of Commons should be allowed to vote on whether the request is granted. Many are suspicious the request is politically motivated and designed to bolster President Bush before presidential elections on November 2.

"We are about to enter a period of increased activity in Iraq. This is nothing to do with the American elections," Blair told the House of Commons. "It has everything to do with the Iraqi elections in January."

"I believe we are right to be in Iraq," Blair added. "I think the stabilisation of Iraq and bringing democracy to that country is in the interests of this country."

American military commanders asked Britain on October 10 to reposition a small number of soldiers, now stationed in southern Iraq, to the US-controlled sector farther north, to free up American soldiers to step up their assault on insurgents.

The government has not said how many troops might be redeployed, or to where. But military sources have said that if the request were granted, Britain's reserve regiment, the 650-strong First Battalion Black Watch, which is stationed near the southern port city of Basra, would be the obvious choice.

Family of 6 killed

US air strikes killed a family of six in an attack meant for fighters loyal to a self-declared al-Qaida ally, while one of the world's largest aid agencies suspended operations in Iraq after its manager was kidnapped, Reuters adds. Men chanted "There is no God but Allah!" as they carried the body of the father through the rubble of the razed family home in the rebel-held town of Fallujah on Wednesday. "Is this the gift that (interim Prime Minister) Iyad Allawi is giving to the people of Fallujah?" asked one man, pointing to the small bodies of two of the children.

Blair will not say sorry over Iraq

Associated Press
London, October 13

PRIME MINISTER Tony Blair vigorously denied on Wednesday that he misrepresented intelligence about Iraqi weapons before the war, rejecting growing demands in Parliament to apologise for misleading his country.

Blair again accepted that British intelligence pointing to stockpiles of chemical and biological weapons was flawed, but he insisted he had been right to back the US-led invasion.

"I take full responsibility and apologise for any information given in good faith that has subsequently turned out to be wrong," Blair told the House of Commons, in a stormy session dominated by the war. "What I do not in any way accept is that there was any deception of anyone. I will not apologise for removing Saddam Hussein. I will not apologise for the conflict. I believe it was right then, is right now and essential for the wider security of that region and world."

Eighteen months after the war began, Iraq still haunts Blair and dominates the political debate in Britain.

He appears to be weathering the storm, however. Although Blair's popularity slumped in the wake of the invasion, according to recent opinion polls it has stabilised and he is considered more trustworthy than his main political opponents.

Blair's principal reason for joining the US-led offensive was his belief that Saddam had stockpiles of weapons of mass destruction. The government highlighted the danger in a September 2002 dossier as it tried to persuade a sceptical public of the need for war. But an official inquiry concluded in July that British intelligence on Iraqi WMD was flawed, that the government had pushed its case to the limits of available intelligence, and it had left out vital caveats in the dossier.

Four inquiries have cleared Blair's government of deliberately misleading the public about the Iraqi threat, but that has failed to satisfy his political opponents. Opposition Conservative Party leader Michael Howard pointed out on Wednesday that before the war, Blair said that intelligence had "established beyond doubt" that Saddam had continued to produce chemical and biological weapons, when evidence was patchy at best. "I support the war. It was the right thing to do," said Howard. "But will you realise that before you can move on, there is one matter that you must deal with. You didn't accurately report the intelligence you received to the country. Will you now say sorry for that?"

Blair hotly contested any suggestion he misled the country. "I cannot bring myself to say that I misrepresented the evidence, since I do not accept that I did," he countered.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

14 OCT 2004

Iraq war divided Britain: Blair

Associated Press

BRIGHTON, Sept. 28. — Prime Minister Mr Tony Blair said today he realised the war in Iraq had divided Britain, but insisted he could not sincerely apologise for helping topple Saddam Hussein.

In a speech interrupted by anti-war protesters, who booed and heckled him, Mr Blair called on Britons to support his efforts to bring democracy to the conflict-torn country.

"I know this issue has divided the country. I entirely understand why many disagree," Mr Blair told the Labour Party's annual conference, which has been overshadowed by the war.

"The evidence about Saddam having actual biological and chemical weapons, as opposed to the capability to develop them, has turned out to be wrong. I acknowledge that and accept it," he said.

"And the problem is I can apologise for the information that turned out to be wrong, but I can't, sincerely at least, apologise for removing Saddam. The world is a better place with Saddam in prison not in power."

Mr Blair called on Britain to "unite in our determination to stand by the



A police officer looks at a poster held by pro-hunter supporters as they gather on the Brighton Pier to protest against the Labour Party conference in Brighton on Tuesday. — AFP

Iraqi people until the job is done."

With national elections widely expected next year, Mr Blair wanted the five-day conference to be a springboard for new domestic policies. But anger over the war among some Labour Party members was evident. One delegate shouted at Mr Blair from the conference floor: "You've got blood on your hands," he screamed, before being led away.

Thousands of fox-hunting supporters protested outside the conference hall where Mr Blair was speaking, and police intervened to keep pro- and anti-hunt demonstrators apart. Police said about 8,000 people, along with 1,000 dogs, marched from Brighton's main pier to the conference centre shortly before Mr Blair's address to oppose a government plan to ban hunting with hounds. //

THE STATESMAN

29 SEP 2001

Blair backing on UN seat, J&K terror

Vijay Dutt
London, September 20

IN THE magnificent interiors of 10 Downing Street, a "nostalgic" Manmohan Singh today won support from Britain on the issues of a permanent Security Council seat and Kashmir terrorism while giving away nothing on sending troops to Iraq.

The Indian Prime Minister had a 45-minute meeting with British Premier Tony Blair in the presence of aides followed by a 10-minute one-on-one. Singh struck a nostalgic note when he recalled how, 50 years ago, he was in the UK as a student and had seen 10 Downing Street from the outside. Today, as India's Prime Minister, "I am inside as a guest of the British Prime Minister."

Blair reciprocated by announcing unambiguous support for a permanent Security Council seat for New Delhi. "India, with a population of 1.3 billion, ought to be represented in the UN Security Council and involved in the G-8 process," Blair said at a news conference after the meeting. The G-8 cannot deal with issues like climate change without the involvement of India and China, given their huge economy, he added.

The British Prime Minister also unreservedly condemned terrorism in Kashmir, saying: "There is no equivocation on the issue. We condemn all forms of terrorism, in relation to Kashmir or any other part of the world. We condemn the killings of innocent civilians and elected politicians."

Singh was asked whether In-

Joint declaration

Terrorism Work together to combat terrorism in all forms & manifestations

Defence Expand joint military training & exercises, explore co-production of defence equipment

Economy Set up joint economic & trade committee, headed by ministers, to develop 'strategic economic relationship' and enhance bilateral trade & investment in specific sectors

Education By 2008, 25,000 students from UK & India will be studying in each other's academic institutions

dia might send troops to Iraq. He said no, but India is committed to helping the humanitarian and rehabilitation process there. Blair, asked about this, tried to work out a defence of the Iraq war by citing the example of India: he said the country is a "testament to the fact that people, given a choice, (want) democracy."

Blair added, "India is an extraordinary example of a working democracy, despite its problems of development. It is home to 150 million Muslims and other religions, yet it values tolerance." After meeting the media, the two Prime Ministers had a working lunch over poached salmon and basmati rice.

■ More reports on Page 2

Leak reveals Blair was warned of chaos

19/9
w-k

MICHAEL SMITH

London, Sept. 18: Tony Blair was warned a year before invading Iraq that a stable post-war government would be impossible without keeping large numbers of troops there for "many years", secret government papers reveal.

The documents, seen by *The Daily Telegraph*, show more clearly than ever the grave reservations expressed by Jack Straw, the foreign secretary, over the consequences of a second Gulf war and how prescient his foreign office officials were in predicting the ensuing chaos.

They told the Prime Minister that there was a risk of the Iraqi system "reverting to type" after a war, with a future government acquiring the very weapons of mass destruction that an attack would be designed to remove.

The documents further

show that the Prime Minister was advised that he would have to "wrong foot" Saddam Hussein into giving the allies an excuse for war, and that British officials believed that President George W. Bush merely wanted to complete his father's "unfinished business" in a "grudge match" against Saddam.

But it is the warning of the likely aftermath — more than a year in advance, as Blair was deciding to commit Britain to joining a US-led invasion — that is likely to cause most controversy and embarrassment in both London and Washington.

More than 900 allied troops have been killed in Iraq since the end of the war, 33 of them British. More than 10,000 civilians are believed to have been killed. At least 13 civilians died yesterday in a suicide bomb attack on a police checkpoint in Baghdad. The Iraqi

health ministry said a further 45 civilians had died in US air attacks on Fallujah overnight.

Straw predicted in March 2002 that post-war Iraq would cause major problems, telling Blair in a letter marked: "Secret and personal" that no one had a clear idea of what would happen afterwards. "There seems to be a larger hole in this than anything."

Most of the US assessments argued for regime change as a means of eliminating Iraq's weapons of mass destruction, Straw said.

"But no one has satisfactorily answered how there can be any certainty that the replacement regime will be any better. Iraq has no history of democracy so no one has this habit or experience."

Senior ministerial advisers warned bluntly in a "Secret UK Eyes Only" options paper that "the greater investment of western forces, the

greater our control over Iraq's future, but the greater the cost and the longer we would need to stay".

The paper, compiled by the Cabinet Office Overseas and Defence Secretariat, added: "The only certain means to remove Saddam and his elite is to invade and impose a new government, but this would involve nation-building over many years." Replacing Saddam with another "Sunni strongman" would allow the allies to withdraw their troops quickly. This leader could be persuaded not to seek WMD in exchange for large-scale assistance with reconstruction.

"However, there would then be a strong risk of the Iraqi system reverting to type. Military coup could succeed until an autocratic Sunni dictator emerged who protected Sunni interests. With time he could acquire WMD," the paper said.

The documents also show the degree of concern within Whitehall that America was ready to invade Iraq with or without backing from any of its allies. Sir David Manning, Blair's foreign policy adviser, returned from talks in Washington in mid-March 2002 warning that Bush "still has to find answers to the big questions", which included "what happens on the morning after?".

In a letter to the Prime Minister marked: "Secret — strictly personal", he said: "I think there is a real risk that the administration underestimates the difficulties. They may agree that failure isn't an option, but this does not mean they will necessarily avoid it." The cabinet office said that the US believed that the legal basis for war already existed and had lost patience with the policy of containment.



Jack Straw and Tony Blair: Clutching at straws

THE DAILY TELEGRAPH

①
17-04
11-04

U.K. to review Parliament security

By Hasan Suroor

LONDON, SEPT. 16. In unprecendented scenes, not witnessed in living memory, a group of pro-hunt campaigners stormed the House of Commons on Wednesday afternoon and managed to reach within inches of the front benches where Ministers and the Prime Minister sit, though Tony Blair was not present.

The dramatic invasion of what is regarded as sanctum sanctorum of the Commons happened when the MPs were debating a controversial bill to ban fox-hunting even as protesters in the Parliament Square outside fought pitched battles with the police who resorted to a baton charge to control the situation.

Wearing t-shirts with mock-Blair pictures and shouting slogans, five men emerged from an entrance beside the Speaker's chair and headed for the 'well' of the House, circling round the Prime Minister's dispatch box before they were grabbed by marshals in coat-tails. They shouted at the Rural Affairs Minister, Alun Michael, who was piloting the fox-hunting legislation. "This is not democracy. This is a denial of democracy," they said gesticulating at the hapless Minister.

Extraordinary scenes

The extraordinary scenes provoked outrage among MPs who called for heads to roll for what they described as the worst-ever security breach of the Commons. While protest

actions from the visitors' galleries have been a common occurrence, this was the first time in the history of modern Parliament that demonstrators managed to enter the debating chamber despite heightened security.

The incident added to the embarrassment of the security establishment, coming as it did barely 24 hours after an activist of "Fathers4Justice" was able to scale the walls of the heavily-guarded Buckingham Palace.

The Speaker, Michael Martin, ordered an urgent investigation and called for additional security in the vicinity to the chamber. He said a Commons pass holder "apparently gave assistance to the intruders" but it was not clear whether he was an MP, a member of the staff or a jour-

nalist. He told MPs that eight protesters were let into the House of Commons using a 'forged' letter inviting them to a meeting in the committee corridor.

History of sorts

"Once there, they were led in to the small stairway to the north end of the corridor — probably by a pass holder who was clearly exceeding his or her authority," he said. Three were stopped but five managed to sneak into the chamber, creating a history of sorts. It emerged that the intruders had done a "dry run" the previous day and had even tipped off the BBC about their intentions but it did not take them seriously.

The bill was passed by an overwhelming majority.

Degree-for-cash scandal in UK

London, Aug. 1 (PTI): A degree-for-cash racket, featuring some big names, has come to light in the UK, media reports said today.

The "degree-for-sale" scandal involves prestigious institutions as well as former polytechnics and includes undergraduate and postgraduate degrees, foreign and home students, *The Observer* claimed. In the most extreme case, the newspaper said it has "evidence of a professor ordering staff to mark up students at risk of falling in order to keep the money coming in".

Lecturers at institutions across the country, including Ox-

ford, London and Swansea told the newspaper the scandal is undermining academic standards, but they cannot speak publicly for fear of losing their jobs.

In the most blatant example of the financial pressure to pass failing students, Professor Richard Wynne, head of Bournemouth University's design, engineering and computing department, emailed staff telling them to "minimise" the number of failures because of a drop in applications, the report said.

"I would urge all academic staff involved in marking examinations to look very carefully at those students gaining marks in

the 30s. If the mark is 38/90 (just below the pass mark) then please, where possible, look for the extra 1/2 marks if appropriate and not leave it to the exam board to make this decision," he wrote, according to the newspaper.

According to the report, Bournemouth University has given Wynne its full backing, claiming that his e-mail simply urges a closer scrutiny of borderline students.

Clarifying its position, Oxford University in a statement said: "The university sets great importance on both the rigour and fairness of its examination procedures. Candidates are ex-

amined anonymously, with numbers rather than names or other identifying details on exam papers. Papers are blind double marked, with external examiners carrying out random quality control checks and adjudicating in borderline cases or where there are discrepancies in the double marking."

The newspaper, however, claimed that according to its investigation, university staff are being put under increasing pressure to pass foreign students studying for masters' degrees as the income from these students is keeping many universities afloat. Since the mid-1990s, the num-

ber of foreign graduates coming to Britain has risen from nearly 7,000 to more than 33,000. The income from non-EU foreign students is estimated at £600 million.

Many universities now believe income from foreign students is the only solution, and some have decided to cut courses as a result, the report said. Foreign students pay £30,000 a year to study for a business degree — six times the income received from a UK undergraduate. Even masters' degrees in traditional academic subjects cost as much as £7,000 for foreign students. Universities lose about £5,000 on each UK student.

Ten years to the day that Tony Blair took 10 Downing Street from the Conservatives, he is still looking for his legacy, writes TOM BALDWIN

FOR all his troubles over Iraq, UK Prime Minister Tony Blair does enjoy a good laugh with his colleagues around the Cabinet table. One such occasion was a couple of weeks back when Charlie Falconer treated them all to a presentation about freedom of information. Of course, he should be properly addressed as Lord Falconer of Thoroton, the Lord Chancellor. But Tony Blair's former flatmate is always Charlie, even before the government succeeds in getting rid of his silly old title.

Anyway, Charlie explained that they were all in a bit of a pickle with freedom of information legislation. Tony pointed the finger of blame at Jack (Straw, the foreign secretary, who – as home secretary – had been responsible for this cautiously liberal measure).

Back came Jack, saying his Bill had been based on a speech that Tony delivered before the 1997 election. Tony replied that the speech had been written by Pat (McFadden, one of his chief advisors). Pat, who was sitting in on the Cabinet meeting, clasped his head in his hands and muttered: "That was in my youth." Hilarity (perhaps Blairity) broke out around the table.

Wednesday was the 10th anniversary of Blair becoming Labour leader, and whatever else has happened to the youthful dreams of his government there remains at least some of that "just call me Tony" style which so excited voters back then. Our sofa-lounging, casually clad, guitar-strumming Prime Minister still likes making key decisions at informal meetings with his inner circle. It is a system which caused tut-tutting only last week from a former Cabinet secretary, Lord Butler, who criticised Blair for by-passing Whitehall's traditional machinery of government. One Downing Street aide responded, rather truculently, by saying that Lord Butler was exactly the sort who believed "things were better in my day".

Perhaps because of his own private school education, Blair has always carried an air of slightly affected rebellion. Even now, with his mane looking as thin as British intelligence on Iraq, he still wears his hair a little over the collar. But he is a rebel increasingly detached from that rock'n'roll cause. This is the Prime Minister who, on Monday, promised to stand up for the "decent law-abiding majority" against the "Sixties" liberal consensus on crime.

Indeed, freedom of information, a trigger for much ministerial mirth the other day, is one of many liberal-Left policies once enthusiastically advocated by Blair

which have now largely been shelved. Another was a democratically elected House of Lords, a measure which featured in his leadership manifesto 10 years ago. Last year, it was effectively junked when he said he favoured a fully appointed chamber. If Blair ever regarded his personal project as bringing about a new constitutional settlement or healing the 20th century's Labour-Liberal schism, he no longer does.

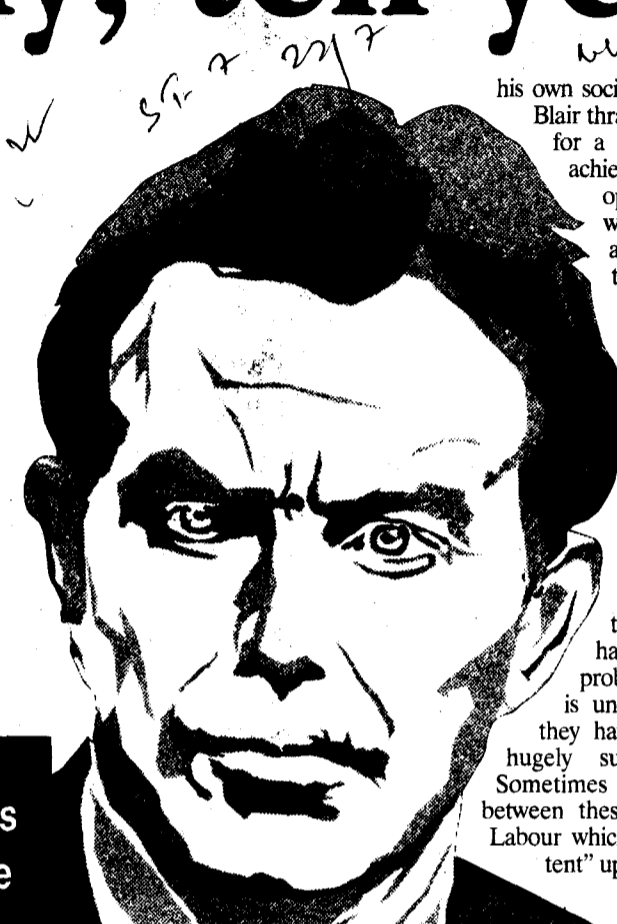
He has not only largely abandoned the politics of the Islington barrister he once was, but also the accompanying Tuscan holidays. It is doubtful that 10 years ago he would have wished to stay at Sir Cliff Richard's Barbados mansion, the gauche destination of choice both this summer and last.

The final straw for many of his old neighbours was, of course, the invasion of Iraq. This was certainly not in the brochure in 1994. Iraq has been an extraordinarily counter-intuitive, as well as defining, episode for Blair. Before, the conventional wisdom had been that he was flotsam on the tide of public opinion, with spin his only means of propelling himself incrementally forward. But in this case, he defied the polls, risked everything on intelligence material he knew to be patchy and, most surprisingly of all, spun it very badly.

His reasons for going to war were never based solely on Iraq's weapons of mass destruction. This evidence was the legal and immediate justification for a position that was more liberal-Left than his critics would admit. He hoped to ease the USA back into multilateral solutions and progressive engagement with West Asia. He made the case for WMD disproportionately and sometimes dysfunctionally, partly because he so desperately wanted UN backing for a war to enforce existing resolutions against Iraq on this issue. He did not so much lie as do what politicians and journalists always do – cherry-pick facts to make the strongest case possible without acknowledging doubts.

Such boldness in the international arena, which produced better results in Afghanistan and Kosovo, contrasts sharply with the caution he has shown on European and domestic policy. He hesitated on calling a referendum on the euro when he might have won, and has done little to build a consensus for the single currency since. Even on public services, Blair

Tony, ten years on



Blair believes he has come through his darkest period on Iraq and now is telling friends that he intends to serve much, even most, of a third term

his own social justice agenda while Blair thrashed around searching for a big, visionary idea, an achievement worthy of this opportunity, but also one which did not chip away at the new-Labour coalition he had built.

There are disparate accounts about the mythical deal they made at the Granita restaurant in Islington in 1994. Most accept that Blair ceded control of large tracts of economic and domestic policy to Brown. More contentiously, it is alleged that he promised to hand over the leadership, probably about now. What is undoubtedly true is that they have shared power in a hugely successful partnership. Sometimes it was the tension between these twin pillars of new Labour which kept the party's "big tent" upright.

Blair's reluctance to alienate any section of the elec-

torate created a constantly moving and slippery target. He has refused to act out of spite against traditional Tory voters whose soaring property prices and rising salaries under this government have mostly offset Brown's stealthy tax increases and redistribution. When farmers, during the foot-and-mouth epidemic of 2001, were cast in the role of victims, as the miners had been under Margaret Thatcher, the government spent billions protecting a meat export market worth only hundreds of millions. His refusal to obey the demands of Labour MPs by banning foxhunting also reflects what he calls a desire to "govern for the whole country" – best translated as not

believes he hesitated too long before beginning in earnest. It was only in the government's second term that it felt able to sanction direct tax increases to pay for the NHS or introduce the reforms which are now exploiting and squeezing down the private sector. At the outset, 10 years ago, he certainly showed no lack of ruthlessness in barging Gordon Brown aside in the succession to John Smith. He admits privately that he got lucky at a time when Brown, who had been the senior partner for most of the 11 years since they both entered the Commons, was at a low ebb.

But in that summer of 1994 it was clear to just about everyone, if not immediately to the future Chancellor, that Blair was the man to take the helm on the voyage of modernisation they had charted for new Labour. This culminated in a bold strike against Labour's old Clause 4 mass nationalisation pledge. Blair declared that the party should say what it means and mean what it says. But by the time of the 1997 election the Labour leader was spending most of his time promising not to do things, defining his programme for government in negatives. He would not raise income tax, he would not give favours to trade unions, he would not break Tory spending targets.

Afterwards the sheer, unexpected scale of his landslide created further inertia. Brown continued to grind out

making enemies of the voters.

For the past 10 years, the Tories have failed to get a grip on him, despite trying every variation of attack. He has been denounced as a front for old Labour, a New Danger, a wild-eyed Euro-fanatic, a man of all spin and no substance, a cheat who tricked the electorate and a liar whom we should not trust. Yet, for all bar a few months over the past 10 years, Blair and new Labour have kept a stubborn – if latterly diminished – lead in the opinion polls.

Blair believes he has come through his darkest period on Iraq and now is telling friends that he intends to serve much, even most, of a third term. Only now, argue his allies, does the Prime Minister understand the levers of power which he must pull to bring about change. He is desperate for another chance to build a legacy of irreversible change. Looking back at his leadership election manifesto 10 years ago, it is striking how many of his pledges – better schools, welfare reform, creating safer streets, and putting Britain at the heart of Europe – remain unfulfilled or only partially so. They could all be headings for Labour's next general election manifesto.

But his real place in history may be that of the man who won for Labour like no leader has ever done before, a much harder task than he and the Conservative opposition in recent years have made it appear.

Many of his Cabinet colleagues privately fear that Blair will never again fly quite as he did before. Iraq has permanently damaged him and, while he remains an overall asset for the next election, time may run out soon afterwards.

Some think Blair should hand over to Brown before frustrated ambition brings new Labour's "big tent" toppling down on both of them. Ten years must seem like a very long time for the Chancellor. Even at the best of times he has never been a bundle of fun at Cabinet meetings and, no matter how much forced jollity there is around the table just now, Gordon is not laughing. – *The Times*.

22 JUL 2004

19 JUL 2004

THE TELEGRAPH

Blair watered down Butler panel report

MELISSA KITE AND PATRICK HENNESSY

London, July 18: Downing Street secured vital changes to the Butler report before its publication, watering down an explicit criticism of Tony Blair and the way he made the case for war in the House of Commons.

The *Daily Telegraph* has established that the disagreement between No 10 and Lord Butler's inquiry team centred on a passage in an original draft of the report about Blair's statement to MPs in September 2002. The original passage drew a much clearer contrast than the final version of the Butler report between the strong case for war made by Blair and the weakness of the intelligence the Prime Minister received about Iraqi weapons of mass destruction.

The changes secured by No 10 diluted the criticism of Blair and helped Downing Street to mount its main defence — that the report showed that the Prime Minister was acting in good faith.

A member of Lord Butler's team has disclosed to *The Daily Telegraph* that changes were made at the behest of No 10. However, the inquiry member also revealed that on the day he published his report, Lord Butler was preparing publicly to distance himself from Blair if asked at his only press conference whether the PM should resign. "It was not his job to bring down the government," the inquiry member said. "But he was not going to back Blair either."

The deliberately equivocal answer Lord Butler had prepared — which in the end he did not have to deliver because the

question was not asked — would have stood in conspicuous contrast to his explicit request in his report that John Scarlett, the chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee, should not have to step down from his new post as head of MI6.

The attempts by the inquiry to make stronger criticism of Blair in their report were hampered during an exchange of views between Lord Butler and Downing Street that began some 10 days before publication last Wednesday.

Under the rules governing inquiries, any individual who has been criticised or fears he may be criticised has the right to be shown sections of the draft in advance with a view to giving a response. An inquiry member said: "This process was gone through. One or two things were

changed. These were accepted by the committee."

In the original draft a passage on page 114 contained stronger criticism of Blair's Commons statement of September 24, 2002.

The report as published stated, in one of very few direct references to Blair's conduct: "The language in the dossier may have left with readers the impression that there was fuller and firmer intelligence behind the judgments than was the case. Our view... is that judgments in the dossier went to (although not beyond) the outer limits of the intelligence available."

"The Prime Minister's description in his statement to the House of Commons on the day of publication of the dossier, of the picture painted by the intelligence services in the dossier as 'extensive, detailed and authori-

tative', may have reinforced this impression."

In the original draft this last sentence was much stronger, expressing the opinion that Blair personally masterminded the misleading impression left by the dossier. The passage is important because Downing Street maintained last week that the report at no point questions Blair's "good faith".

According to a member of the inquiry, however, the Prime Minister should not be regarded as in the clear. "The whole thing points straight to the man in charge... absolutely to where responsibility belongs, which is the Prime Minister, which is what we could not say."

The disclosures will put further pressure on Blair following the revelation that the earlier Hutton inquiry was not told

about the withdrawal of key intelligence which formed the basis for claims made by the dossier. Downing Street admitted that MI6 withdrew some elements of the intelligence supporting the government's case for war because it was unreliable, but decided not to tell the Hutton inquiry.

Blair's spokesperson said the intelligence service felt the withdrawal was "too sensitive" to be made public at that point. He said the Prime Minister had not been told and only became aware of the withdrawn intelligence because of Lord Butler's inquiry.

A Downing Street spokesperson said: "Lord Butler gave the final copy of the report to the Prime Minister on Tuesday last week. There is only one Butler report."

THE DAILY TELEGRAPH



A portrait of Prime Minister Tony Blair by British sculptor Shenda Amery entitled *How Close is the Horizon*. Amery, known for her sculptured busts of famous figures including former Prime Ministers Margaret Thatcher and John Major, says Blair's expression in the painting portrays the difficulties and dilemmas of a contemporary head of government. (Reuters)

Labour MPs urge Blair to quit

By Hasan Suroor

LONDON, JULY 17. Stung by the party's poor performance in Thursday's two by-elections, Labour MPs have urged the Prime Minister, Tony Blair, to quit saying that he is to blame for the voters' increasing disenchantment with the party.

At least three MPs came out publicly on Saturday to denounce Mr. Blair's leadership and demand his resignation amid speculation that he might not survive the political crisis caused by the Iraq war beyond a few months.

"Blair should go and go now," said Glenda Jackson, a former minister in the Blair Government, adding that Iraq was the main issue that cost the Labour its traditionally safe seat of Leicester South while drastically reducing its victory

margin in Birmingham Hodge Hill which it barely managed to retain.

"Clearly, the issue was Iraq. Far from drawing a line under it, everything the Government does and the Prime Minister says exacerbates it," she said.

Another Labour backbencher, Geraldine Smith said Mr. Blair had been "fatally damaged" by the controversies over the Iraq war and this was causing voters to lose trust in him. "I think the time has come when Tony Blair's friends need to advise him to go with honour at a time of his choosing. The alternative is going to be to wait until his enemies drag him down, or the British people make that decision for him," she said. Her fellow MP, Robert Marshall-Andrews, said the Labour needed a "new leader" after the "disastrous" by-election results.

18 JUL 2004

Shock in London and woe in Baghdad

Pak will send troops to Iraq

IAN S & PTI
Islamabad/Washington, July 14

PAKISTANI PRESIDENT Pervez Musharraf has agreed in principle to assign troops to protect the UN mission in Iraq, especially in view of the appointment of a Pakistani diplomat as the secretary-general's envoy to that country, reports here said.

But there still were some disagreements that US Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage would discuss with Pakistani officials during his visit here this week, Dawn reported, quoting US and diplomatic sources.

They said that UN Secretary General Kofi Annan and US President George W. Bush had personally asked Musharraf for the troops. Marie Okabe, a UN spokeswoman in New York, confirmed that Pakistan had been approached for it, joining a force the world body intends to raise for Iraq but did not say if it had agreed to do so. A UN Security Council resolution adopted last month calls for a special force to protect UN personnel in Iraq.

CIA cold feet on Iraq report

The White House and the CIA have refused to give the Senate Intelligence Committee a one-page summary of intelligence report on Iraq prepared for US President George W. Bush that contains few of the qualifiers and none of the dissents spelled out in longer reviews. Senate Democrats claim the document could help clear up exactly what intelligence agencies told Bush about Iraq's illicit weapons.

Guardian News Service
London, July 14

THE BUTLER Inquiry into the quality of British intelligence on Iraqi weapons of mass destruction said on Wednesday that some sources were "seriously flawed" or "unreliable" but found no evidence of "deliberate distortion or culpable negligence".

The ex-cabinet secretary's 200-page report said Tony Blair's September 2002 dossier should not have included its controversial claim that Saddam Hussein could deploy weapons of mass destruction within 45 minutes. The inquiry said that when the government began considering military action against Iraq in March 2002, the intelligence was "insufficiently robust" to justify claims that Iraq was in breach of United Nations resolutions requiring it to disarm.

And it said that since the conflict, key claims based on reports from agents in Iraq, including claims that the Iraqis had recently produced biological agents, had had to be withdrawn because they were unreliable. The report said that the government's September 2002 dossier went to the "outer limits" of the available intelligence.

It said that Blair's statement in the Commons may have "reinforced the impression" that there was "fuller and firmer" intelligence behind the assessments in the dossier than was actually the case. The inquiry acknowledged that its report would lead to calls for the resig-

Intelligence on WMDs flawed: Butler report



UNMASKED Anti-war protesters demonstrate against Blair in London on Wednesday.

nation of John Scarlett, the chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee who drew up the dossier and who has since been appointed the chief of MI6. It said that it hoped he would stay on. "We have a high regard for his abilities and his record," it said. It said that it had found no evidence that the assessments produced by the JIC in the run-up to the conflict showed evidence of "deliberate distortion or culpable negligence".

But it said that the claim in the dossier that some Iraqi weapons could be deployed within 45 minutes should not have been included. The report was highly critical of intelligence gathering in Iraq. "Validation of human intelligence sources after the war has thrown doubt on a high proportion of those sources and of their reports, and hence on the quality of the intelligence assessments received by ministers and officials in the period from summer 2002 to the outbreak of hostilities," it said.

REPORT CONDEMNS

- The high percentage of human sources and the lacunae in MI6's means of vetting them
- Third-hand information on chemical & biological arms
- Dossier for having claimed Saddam could launch WMDs at 45-minute notice
- Inconclusive evidence on uranium from Niger report

Bomb kills 11 in Iraq as Manila backs out

Associated Press
Baghdad, July 14

A SUICIDE attacker detonated a massive car bomb today at a checkpoint near the British Embassy and the inter-Iraqi government's headquarters, killing 11 people and wounding 40, including a US soldier, authorities said.

Hours earlier, the Philippines said it had begun withdrawing its troops from Iraq, an apparent bid to placate militants who threatened to kill a Filipino hostage if the tiny contingent was not out by July 20.

Underscoring the urgency of the Philippines' predicament, militants in Iraq said they had killed a captive Bulgarian truck driver and threatened to put another Bulgarian hostage to death in 24 hours. The attack targeted a checkpoint leading to a parking lot in the heavily protected Baghdad neighborhood housing government offices and embassies.

Insurgents in other parts of Iraq remained active, continuing to attack US and Iraqi forces and take hostages. Kidnappers holding the Filipino, Angelo dela Cruz, said they would treat him like a prisoner of war if Manila made a good-faith move toward withdrawing

its 51 troops early and would free him if the pullout was complete by July 20.

Another group linked to Abu Musab al-Zarqawi said in a video broadcast on Wednesday on al-Jazeera that it had carried out its threat to kill a Bulgarian truck driver it was holding. The Tawhid and Jihad group said it would kill a second Bulgarian if it was holding within 24 hours if the US did not release all Iraqi detainees.

Mosul governor killed

Insurgents killed the governor of Mosul on Wednesday as his convoy was traveling to Baghdad. Attackers approached the convoy of Gov. Youssef Kashmola about 100 km south of Mosul.



REUTERS
FIRST BLOOD An injured boy at the blast scene.

বাটলার রিপোর্টে নিব্দিত ব্রিটিশ গোয়েন্দা বিভাগ

শ্রাবণী বসু ● লন্ডন ২৫/৭

১৪ জুলাই: ইরাক যুদ্ধ নিয়ে নতুন করে বিপাকে পড়ল ব্ল্যার প্রশাসন। কয়েক দিন আগেই আমেরিকার সেনেটের এক তদন্ত কমিটির রিপোর্টে ইরাক যুদ্ধ নিয়ে সে দেশের গোয়েন্দা বিভাগের ভূমিকার সমালোচনা করা হয়েছিল। এ বারে একই ধাঁচে ব্রিটেনের প্রাক্তন সরকারি আমলা লর্ড রবিন বাটলারের রিপোর্টে ব্রিটেনের গোয়েন্দা দফতরের সমালোচনা করে বলা হয়েছে, যথেষ্ট প্রমাণ ছাড়াই ইরাকের বিরুদ্ধে গণবিধ্বংসী অস্ত্র মজুত রাখার অভিযোগ এনেছিল ব্রিটেনের গোয়েন্দা দফতর। রিপোর্টে বলা হয়েছে, গোয়েন্দা দফতর ইরাকের বিরুদ্ধে ৪৫ মিনিটের নোটসে গণবিধ্বংসী অস্ত্র প্রয়োগের যে সম্ভাবনার উল্লেখ করেছিল তা সম্পূর্ণ ভিত্তিহীন। তবে হাটন কমিটির রিপোর্টের মতোই বাটলার রিপোর্টেও ব্ল্যার প্রশাসনের বিরুদ্ধে ইচ্ছাকৃত ভাবে দেশকে বিভ্রান্ত করার অভিযোগ থেকে মুক্তি দেওয়া হয়েছে।

যুদ্ধ ঘোষণা করার আগে ব্রিটিশ গোয়েন্দা সংস্থা 'এম আই ৬' তথ্যের সূত্র সম্পর্কে যথেষ্ট ওয়াকিবখাল ছিল না

বলে অভিযোগ করে বাটলার বলেছেন, গোয়েন্দা দফতর অনেক সিদ্ধান্ত নেওয়ার আগে তৃতীয় পক্ষের তৈরি রিপোর্টের উপরও নির্ভর করেছে।

১৯৬ পাতার ওই রিপোর্টে অভিযোগ করা হয়েছে, ইরাক সম্পর্কে পাওয়া তথ্যগুলি খতিয়ে দেখার জন্য গোয়েন্দা বিভাগকে ব্ল্যার প্রশাসনের তরফে যথেষ্ট সময় দেওয়া হয়নি। বাটলারের মতে, ইরাকে যুদ্ধ ঘোষণার মাত্র এক মাস আগেই রাষ্ট্রপুঞ্জের প্রতিনিধি দল ইরাকে গিয়ে যখন কোনও গণবিধ্বংসী অস্ত্রের খোঁজ পায়নি, তখনই গোয়েন্দা বিভাগ ও প্রশাসনের উচিত ছিল, পুরো বিষয়টি ফের খতিয়ে দেখা।

সবচেয়ে উল্লেখযোগ্য বিষয় হল, রিপোর্টে সাদাম হুসেনের সঙ্গে আল কায়দার কোনও রকম যোগাযোগ থাকার সম্ভাবনা উড়িয়ে দেওয়া হয়েছে।

তবে এই বিষয়ে ব্ল্যার প্রশাসনকে কোনও রকম দোষারোপ না করে বাটলার বলেছেন, এ নিয়ে কোনও সংশয় নেই যে, সরকার গোয়েন্দা বিভাগের রিপোর্টকেই সম্পূর্ণ বিশ্বাস করেছিল। এর আগে ব্ল্যার প্রশাসনের বিরুদ্ধে অভিযোগ ছিল, ২০০২ সালের মার্চে সরকার

গোয়েন্দা বিভাগকে ইরাকে যুদ্ধ ঘোষণা করার জন্য ইতিবাচক তথ্য এক জায়গা করার নির্দেশ দিয়েছিল। বাটলার রিপোর্টে এই অভিযোগ থেকেও সরকারকে মুক্তি দেওয়া হয়েছে।

বাটলার রিপোর্টে প্রকাশিত সব তথ্য গ্রহণ করার কথা সরকারি ভাবে স্বীকার করে নিয়ে ব্রিটেনের প্রধানমন্ত্রী টনি ব্ল্যার জানিয়ে দিয়েছেন গোয়েন্দা বিভাগের উপর বিশ্বাস রেখে সরকারের তরফে যদি কোনও ভুল হয়ে গিয়ে থাকে তবে তার দায়িত্বও তিনি অস্বীকার করছেন না।

ইরাকে গাড়িবোমা, হত ১০। বাগদাদ থেকে রয়টার্স জানাচ্ছে, আত্মঘাতী গাড়িবোমা হামলায় আজ সকালে বাগদাদে তিন জন ইরাকি রক্ষী-সহ ১০ জনের মৃত্যু হয়েছে। জখম হয়েছেন অন্তত ৪০ জন। শহরের সবচেয়ে নিরাপত্তা বেষ্টিত এলাকা মার্কিন সেনাবাহিনীর প্রধান দফতর 'খিন জোন' চত্বরের মধ্যেই গেরিলারা ওই বিস্ফোরণ ঘটায়। বিস্ফোরণের ঘণ্টাখানেক আগেই আরব টেলিভিশন চ্যানেল 'আল জাজিরা'-তে অপহৃত দুই বুলগেরীয় ট্রাক চালকের এক জনকে হত্যার খবর প্রচার করা হয়।

AMARINDIAH.COM

15 JUL 2004

Blair planned to quit, aides urged him not to: BBC

London, July 10 (Reuters):
British Prime Minister Tony
Blair considered resigning last
month and had to be persuaded
to stay on by senior colleagues,
the BBC reported today.

Blair's office made no comment on the report, saying he had repeatedly insisted when asked about his future that he would lead his ruling Labour party into a third general election expected next year, which analysts predict he would win.

Blair, who has seen his ratings tumble in opinion polls since last year's war in Iraq, had been "seriously considering his position" following a series of attacks on his leadership, the broadcaster said in an un-sourced report.

Three cabinet colleagues, health secretary John Reid, culture secretary Tessa Jowell and education secretary Charles Clarke met Blair, urged him not to quit and sought to assure him he had wide government support, it said.

"I'm not going to speculate on what I see as Westminster gossip," Jowell told BBC radio today. "Tony Blair is our Prime Minister — the most successful Prime Minister of modern times. He will continue to lead our government."

Blair has come under pressure from within party ranks in recent months with some saying the time has come for him to step down.

Some say he is no longer the Labour's best electoral asset and is a liability because of the unpopularity of the Iraq war.

Last month Blair admitted the war had cost his party votes when it was trounced in local government and European Parliament elections.

Blair mass-weapon confession

London, July 6 (Reuters): Britain's Tony Blair admitted today that biological and chemical weapons, which he once insisted Saddam Hussein had primed for use, may never be found.

In parliamentary testimony, the Prime Minister also insisted he had exerted real influence over Washington's approach to post-war Iraq and defended his close ties with President George W. Bush. "We know Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction but we know we haven't found them," Blair said. "I have to accept we have not found them, that we may not find them."

Blair persuaded reluctant British politicians to back war on Iraq last year on the basis that Baghdad had illegal weapons and could use them at any time.

A now notorious UK dossier, released in September 2002, said some of them could have been let loose within 45 minutes

of an order to do so. Yet more than a year after Saddam was toppled, no such weapons have been found. Blair's public trust ratings have withered over the same period.

Blair said the absence of banned weapons did not mean Saddam posed no threat to the region and to world stability, and that he was glad he had been deposed. "They could have been removed, they could have been hidden, they could have been destroyed," he said. "The truth is, he was a threat."

In Washington, White House spokesman Scott McClellan said the Iraq Survey Group, scouring Iraq for lethal weapons, "was looking into the possibility they had been moved abroad."

"They're looking at those issues to determine what happened to those weapons of mass destruction," McClellan said. "We know that he had them because he used them in the past against his own people and

against a neighbouring country." Many in Blair's Labour Party have not forgiven him for the war and his "shoulder-to-shoulder" stance with Bush since the September 11 attacks on the US. Critics claim the premier has secured little in return.

"I can see particularly within my own political family, it's a problem sometimes," Blair said, but refused to give up London's closeness with Washington despite disagreements over issues like climate change.

Marine freed

Kidnappers in Iraq released today a Lebanese-born US Marine they were once thought to have decapitated, his brother said.

Wassef Ali Hassoun's brother Sami, speaking from the northern Lebanese city of Tripoli, said his family had received word Hassoun was alive and had been freed in the early hours



Tony Blair during a parliamentary hearing in London. (Reuters)

Blair blames war for poll debacle

Associated Press

LONDON, June 15. — Mr Tony Blair today admitted that the Iraq war was a factor in the Labour Party's poor showing in the European and local elections, and that a section of the public simply disagreed with his decision to put Britain in the forefront of the US-led coalition.

The British Prime Minister, however, added that he believed he was right to go to war. "I believe that we were right to take military action and remove Saddam Hussein from power and the judgment will

increasingly be seen to be right as time goes on."

Speaking at a press meet today, Mr Blair said he now wanted to focus on domestic issues. "Now is not the time for a change of direction, but it is the time for a change of gear," Mr Blair, who is expected to call national elections next year, said.

Mr Blair said he needed to persuade the country that the government was focused on the issues which it

stressed in winning power in 1997 — a strong economy, low unemployment, improving public services and lowering crime. "...People want to know that even with all the stuff that is going on in

Moore knew more

SAN FRANCISCO, June 15. — US filmmaker Michael Moore says he had footage of prisoner abuse in Iraq but decided to stay quiet until his new movie (*Fahrenheit 9/11*) came out. "I had it months before the story broke on *60 Minutes* (I), and I really struggled with what to do with it," Moore told the *San Francisco Chronicle*. "I wanted to come out with it sooner, but I thought I'd be accused of just putting this out for publicity for my movie. That prevented me from making maybe the right decision," the filmmaker said. — AP



Michael Moore

foreign affairs, I'm actually concentrating on the issues that worry them in their lives: their living standards, behaviour," he said.

'Saddam handover soon'

The USA will hand over Saddam Hussein and all other detainees to the new Iraqi government over the next two weeks as sovereignty is restored to the Iraqi authorities, the interim Prime Minister has said, a report adds from Baghdad.

In an interview with Al-Jazeera TV, Mr Iyad Allawi said Iraqi authorities expect to take possession of Saddam and the other detainees "within the two coming weeks". He added that the former Iraqi President would stand trial "as soon as possible" but he gave no specific timeframe.

Warning signs

Labour party drubbed in UK council elections

Some mud ought to stick even to Britain's teflon-coated Prime Minister after the drubbing received by Labour in UK local and council elections. It is not often that a governing party comes third, but that is the dubious record Blair's party achieves, behind not just the Tories but also the Liberal Democrats. The strong showing of the latter, can be attributed to their opposition to the Iraq war. Home secretary David Blunkett has admitted that the war "split" Labour. Unlike the US, the majority of the British public have always opposed the Iraq war, and the destruction and anarchy unleashed on that unfortunate country without cause, turning the American public against the war. While the Bush people may have been reacting viscerally to 9/11 when they invaded Iraq, an act misguided enough, what is even more puzzling is why a reflective leader like Blair should support it, to the extent of releasing fake intelligence dossiers. As it turned out he had zero leverage on President Bush, whether in terms of military-administrative decisions in Iraq or of holding back, excesses committed on the Palestinians.

In London Ken Livingstone has won, but he is something of a maverick within Labour, attacking its stand on the war and calling President Bush "the greatest threat to life on this planet". It is not clear what effect Iraq is going to have on national elections expected next year — disaffection on Iraq may not translate into a Tory victory as the Tories are in favour of the war. But the problem is that now that the British public knows Tony Blair lied to it on Iraq's WMD, it finds it difficult to trust him on anything else, least of all on big leaps such as taking Britain into the euro-zone. If Blair becomes a liability for Labour there may be a leadership challenge from within and the capable Gordon Brown is waiting in the wings. Bringing in spin doctors at this point will not help Blair, but a candid admission of mistakes followed by a genuine change of course, might.

THE STATESMAN

16 JUN 2005

স্নেহারের ধ্বনি ও প্রতিধ্বনি

বাগদাদে বিক্ষোভের বহর অব্যাহত, এবং সুদূরে বসিয়াও ব্রিটিশ প্রধানমন্ত্রী টনি স্নেয়ার নিশ্চিত ভাবেই তার প্রকোপ অনুভব করিতেছেন। বক্তব্যটি আলঙ্কারিক, কিন্তু বক্তব্যটি ব্রিটিশ প্রধানমন্ত্রীর পক্ষে মর্যাদাসিক রূপে সত্য। স্থানীয় কাউন্সিল নির্বাচনের হারের ধাক্কার পর ফের ইউরোপীয় ইউনিয়নের পার্লামেন্টের ভোটে লেবার পার্টির পরাজয় দেখাইয়া দিল, ইরাক-কাণ্ড ব্রিটিশ প্রধানমন্ত্রীর পক্ষে বিষবৎ হইয়া উঠিতে পারে। এমনকী, বাগদাদে আত্মঘাতী বিক্ষোভের প্রতিভুলনা টানিয়া হয়তো ইহাও বলা চলে, মার্কিন প্রেসিডেন্টের সহিত ইরাক-অভিমুখে যুদ্ধযাত্রা করিয়া স্নেয়ার স্বয়ং একটি আত্মঘাতী কার্য করিয়া বসেন নাই তো? প্রবাদ বলে, একা রামে রক্ষা থাকে না, সুগ্রীব দোসর! কিংবদন্তিটি রামায়ণজাত, এবং সেই মহাকাব্য বলিতেছে সীতা উদ্ধারকর্মে রামকে সাহায্য করিয়া সুগ্রীব অন্তত জ্যেষ্ঠ ভ্রাতা বালীর সিংহাসনটি পাইয়াছিলেন। ইরাক-যুদ্ধেও ব্রিটিশ প্রধানমন্ত্রীর ভূমিকাটি ছিল অনেকাংশে সুগ্রীবেরই অনুরূপ। যুদ্ধের মূল হোতা মার্কিন যুক্তরাষ্ট্রের প্রেসিডেন্ট জর্জ ডবলিউ বুশ। তাহার ধূয়া ধরিয়া ব্রিটিশ প্রধানমন্ত্রীও 'রণং দেহি' ভাব লইয়াছিলেন। তাঁহারা কেহই আন্তর্জাতিক জনমতের ধার ধারেন নাই, এমনকী দেশবাসীর ক্ষোভকেও উড়াইয়া দিয়াছিলেন। ঘটনাক্রমে দুই নেতাই যে যাঁহার দেশে ভোটের সম্মুখীন। দুই জনই যথেষ্ট বেকায়দায়, কিন্তু সাম্প্রতিক পরিস্থিতি দেখিয়া মনে হইতেছে, রাম এ যাত্রা পার পাইলেও পাইতে পারেন, সুগ্রীবের তরীটি হয়তো ডুবিল।

ব্রিটেনে স্থানীয় কাউন্সিল নির্বাচনে ক্ষমতাসীন লেবার পার্টি যে তৃতীয় স্থান লাভ করিয়াছে, সেই তথ্য এক্ষণে সুবিদিত। পটভূমিটি খেয়াল রাখিলে স্মরণে আসিবে, গত সেপ্টেম্বরে ব্রেস্ট ইস্ট আসনের উপনির্বাচনেও লেবার পার্টির প্রার্থী পরাজিত হইয়াছিলেন। সেই প্রেক্ষিতে ব্রিটেনে স্থানীয় নির্বাচনের ফল এবং ইউরোপীয় ইউনিয়নের পার্লামেন্টের ভোটে লেবার পার্টির হতমান ছবি রাখিলে বুঝা যায়, যুদ্ধযাত্রায় ক্ষুব্ধ ব্রিটেনবাসী প্রধানমন্ত্রী টনি স্নেয়ারকে ছাড়িয়া কথা বলিবে না। তৎসহ, লেবার পার্টির নেতৃত্ব লইয়া বিতর্কও ফের মাথাচাড়া দিতে পারে বলিয়া বিশেষজ্ঞদের অনুমান। অর্থাৎ গদি তো বটেই, দলীয় নেতৃত্ব খোয়ানোর সম্ভাবনাও উড়াইয়া

দেওয়া যায় না। কবি একদা রঘুপতি রামের চরিত্রবর্ণনা করিবার ছলে বলিয়াছিলেন, 'বিপদে যিনি একা নির্ভীক' তিনিই যথার্থ বীর। অস্ত্র এখনও পর্যন্ত স্নেয়ার সেই বীরত্বের পরাকাষ্ঠা প্রদর্শনে ব্যস্ত। তিনি জানাইয়াছেন, 'যুদ্ধ-বিরোধী' ভোটের মধ্যে স্নায়ুবৈকল্য ঘটাইলে চলিবে না। তিনি ইহাও বলিয়াছেন যে কাউন্সিল ভোটের হার সাধারণ নির্বাচনের ইঙ্গিতবাহী হইতে না-ও পারে। না-হইলেই তাঁহার পক্ষে মঙ্গল, কেননা সাধারণ নির্বাচন আগামী বৎসরে নির্ধারিত, এবং এমনও ইঙ্গিত মিলিয়াছে যে আসন্ন অক্টোবরেই তিনি নির্বাচন ডাকিতে পারেন।

বিশেষজ্ঞদের একটি মহল বলিতেছে, অবস্থা এখনও স্নেয়ারের আয়ত্তের বাহিরে যায় নাই, কারণ ইরাক-পরিস্থিতির উন্নতি ঘটিলেই জনমত অন্য মোড় লইবে। ইরাকের সাম্প্রতিক অবস্থা দেখিলে কিন্তু আশাবাদী হইবার সুযোগ কম। ৩০ জুন ক্ষমতা হস্তান্তর কতটা সফল ভাবে করা যাইবে, তাহা লইয়া চিন্তার শেষ নাই। নাশকতামূলক কাজকর্ম যে হারে বাড়িতেছে, গত ২৪ ঘণ্টায় যে ভাবে দুইটি গাড়িবোমা বিক্ষোভ ঘটিয়াছে, তাহাতে শঙ্কা জাগা স্বাভাবিক। হস্তান্তরের পর আইনশৃঙ্খলার অবস্থা আরও খারাপ হইবে না তো? ইরাকের নবনিযুক্ত কর্তৃপক্ষ সখেদে বলিয়াছেন, ইরাকের নিজস্ব রক্ষীবাহিনীকে ভাঙিয়া দেওয়া মোটেই ভাল কাজ হয় নাই। এই পরিস্থিতিতে ইরাকে যদি জটিলতা সতাই বৃদ্ধি পায়, তাহার রেশ স্নেয়ারের গাত্রে আসিয়া পড়িতে বাধ্য। তাঁহার পক্ষে আরও চিন্তার কথা ইহাই যে শুধু ইরাক নহে, ইউরোপীয় ইউনিয়ন লইয়া তাঁহার তৎপরতাতেও দেশবাসী সন্তুষ্ট নহে। ইউনিয়নে যোগদানের ঘোর বিরোধী 'ইউনাইটেড কিংডম ইনডিপেন্ডেন্স পার্টি' যে ভাবে উঠিয়া আসিতেছে, তাহাতে স্নেয়ারের কপালে চিন্তার ভাঁজ গভীরতর হওয়া স্বাভাবিক। বাস্তব অভিজ্ঞতাই বলিবে, ইরাক-কাণ্ড লইয়া টনি স্নেয়ার নিজস্ব কথা বলিবার তুলনায় মার্কিন প্রেসিডেন্টের বক্তব্যের প্রতিধ্বনি করাটাই অধিকতর পছন্দ করেন। সমস্যা হইল, এ বার তাঁহাকে জনতার আদালতে নিজস্ব ধ্বনি লইয়াই সরব হইতে হইবে। কী বলিবেন টনি স্নেয়ার, তাহা লইয়া অনুমান চলিতেই পারে, কিন্তু আরও গুরুত্বপূর্ণ প্রশ্নটি হইল, এ ব্যাপারে তাঁহার ঝুলিতে নিজস্ব বক্তব্য আছে তো?

WY (1)
10-10

LABOUR PAYS FOR BLAIR

15/6 W

FOREIGN POLICY DOES not ordinarily occupy the top spot in the list of issues over which local elections are won or lost. But there is no doubt that Prime Minister Tony Blair's unstinted servile support to the United States-led invasion of Iraq and his subsequent justifications of it played a vital role in the drubbing that the Labour Party has received in the British local government elections. Even Mr. Blair has been forced to concede that Iraq was a factor in the defeat. The party has lost control of councils that were its traditional strongholds and, unthinkable for itself, it has finished third behind the Liberal Democrats and the Conservative Party in terms of vote share — the worst performance by a ruling party in a crucial test of its popularity. The British Government's decisions on Iraq seem to have alienated not just Muslim supporters, which the Labour Party had braced itself for, but large sections of its electoral base across lines of race and ethnicity. It will not be easy for the party to shrug off this debacle in the way the British Government glossed over last year's mammoth anti-war protest in which nearly a million people participated.

The defeat places the spotlight on Mr. Blair and his leadership of the Labour Party, which he led to victory in the 2001 general elections but for whose sharp drop in popularity since then, he must take full responsibility. Britain's decision to join the U.S.-led coalition in the war against Iraq was supposedly the result of Mr. Blair's conviction that such a war was "just" and right, his near-missionary zeal for changing the world, and his personal relations with the U.S. President, George W. Bush. By toadying up to the U.S., Mr. Blair pushed Britain into an illegal and anti-human war that his country did

not want, and by doing this, he ran through his party's powerful popular mandate like a profligate. The British Prime Minister had sought to explain his decision to join hands with the U.S. against Iraq as a step that would moderate American unilateralism. It is quite apparent that Mr. Blair brought no such influence to bear on U.S. policy in Iraq, or for that matter, on the crucial question of resolving the Israel-Palestine crisis. Instead, his dishonourable gamble lost Britain much goodwill and respect around the world and alienated it from its European neighbours.

Even before the local government elections, the feeling had emerged within the Labour Party that Mr. Blair was more liability than asset. Post-debacle, that impression is bound to grow. One prominent Labour leader, Clare Short, has already publicly called upon Mr. Blair to step aside from the leadership. The Prime Minister's supporters within the party may say that the local elections are not a forerunner to the general election, which is due in about a year. But Mr. Blair's appeal to his colleagues not to lose nerve is unlikely to console jittery Labourites who are facing up to the party's worst electoral showing since the 1970s. While the Conservative Party's victory in these elections does not necessarily make it the frontrunner at the next parliamentary election, the results do show that as long as Iraq remains an issue with voters, Labour will continue to lose supporters, especially to pronouncedly anti-war parties like the Liberal Democrats. The hope in the Blair camp is that the transfer of power to an interim Iraqi government will soften voter anger. If that does not work, the only option for Labour might be to dissociate itself from Mr. Blair and his agenda.

Blair punished over Iraq, Labour third in polls

London, June 11 (Reuters): Britons angry over Iraq punished Prime Minister Tony Blair today, relegating his Labour Party to an unprecedented third place in local elections.

"Iraq was a cloud, or indeed a shadow, over these elections," deputy Prime Minister John Prescott said after the main Opposition Conservatives triumphed along with the Liberal Democrats in results from yesterday's vote.

"I am not saying we haven't had a kicking. It's not a great day for Labour," said Prescott.

The local council poll outcome, likely to be echoed in European Parliament results on Sunday, will renew speculation about Blair's leadership. The result of London's mayoral race may also weigh against Blair's handling of Iraq.

But analysts still believe Blair — US President George W. Bush's closest ally over Iraq — will win a third general election, widely expected to be held in 2005. With results in from 144 of the 166 contested councils, his Labour Party had lost a net 388 seats and control of seven councils, including its northern strongholds of Newcastle and Leeds.

BBC projections put Labour's vote share at 26 per cent, way behind the Conservatives on 38 per cent. The Liberal Democrats, strong opponents of the Iraq war, had 30 per cent.

"What you have got is a government that is clearly unpopular, but a main Opposition party that is not capitalising," said opinion pollster Peter Kellner.

He said the Conservatives needed 40 per cent or more to be on course for victory at the next general election. The Conservatives, however, were upbeat.

"It has been Labour's worst electoral performance in living memory and it is the first time that a government has been



Tony Blair at the G8 summit in Sea Island, Georgia. (Reuters)

pushed into third place in mid-term elections," said Conservative chairman Liam Fox.

The results will heighten calls from some quarters for Blair to give way to his powerful finance minister Gordon Brown.

Blair has said he is "up for" a third general election bid and this week's unanimous UN Security Council resolution on Iraq offers the prospect of some respite on a persistently damaging issue.

The Conservatives might have fared better were it not for a surge by the previously marginal UK Independence Party (UKIP), which advocates Britain's withdrawal from the European Union.

By 1530 GMT, the Conservatives had made gains of 208 seats and 11 councils. The UKIP won

its first council seats.

An opinion poll said the UKIP, tapping into Britons' wary view of Europe, would win up to 12 of 78 British seats in the European Parliament when the results were declared on Sunday.

The Liberal Democrats, long Britain's third party, benefited from their opposition to the Iraq war. "Iraq cast a long shadow across these elections," party leader Charles Kennedy said.

In London, Labour's Ken Livingstone is tipped to edge to re-election as mayor, but he has wasted no chance to assert his independence from Blair over issues such as Iraq.

A Livingstone win will say little about Blair's popularity. Labour's overall battering will be placed squarely at his door.

But Blair still commands a

huge majority in parliament.

Czechs vote

The Czechs became the first people from behind the old "Iron Curtain" to vote in a European Parliament election today.

Vaclav Havel, the ailing playwright and statesman who led the Czech Republic from communism to the brink of EU membership, was among the first to vote.

"It's the very first election in history when we share in a decision about the future of our continent," he said after posting his ballot in a diplomatic quarter at Prague Castle.

স্থানীয় ভোটে ব্লেয়ারকে ধাক্কা দিল ইরাক

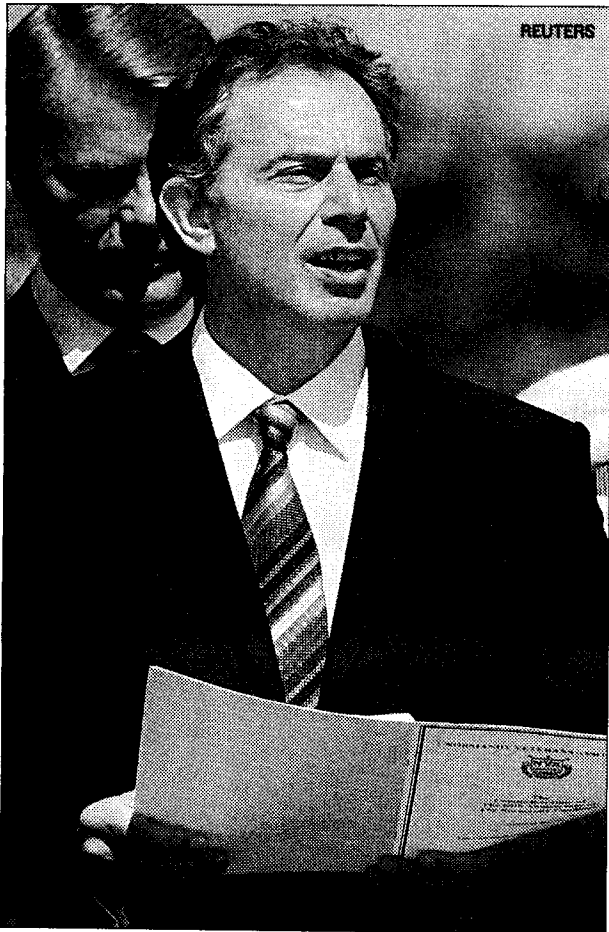
শ্রাবণী বসু • লন্ডন

১১ জুন: ব্রিটেনের স্থানীয় কাউন্সিল নির্বাচনের প্রকাশিত ফলাফলে প্রধানমন্ত্রী টনি ব্লেয়ারের লেবার পার্টি তৃতীয় স্থানে নেমে গিয়েছে। ইরাক যুদ্ধ যে এই অবনমনের পিছনে অনেকখানি দায়ী, সেটা এখন ব্লেয়ার নিজেও স্বীকার করছেন। এই নির্বাচনকে আগামী পার্লামেন্ট নির্বাচনে ব্লেয়ার যুগের অবসানের পূর্বাভাস বলে মনে করতে শুরু করেছেন অনেকেই। দলের মধ্যে ব্লেয়ারকে সরানোর জন্য গুঞ্জনও তাই ক্রমশ দানা বাঁধছে। লেবার পার্টি মোট ১৬৬টি কাউন্সিলে প্রতিদ্বন্দ্বিতা করেছে। তার মধ্যে প্রকাশিত ৯৫টি কাউন্সিলের ফলাফলে দেখা যাচ্ছে, মোট ২৩৪টি আসন হারিয়েছে তারা। হাতছাড়া হয়েছে ৭টি কাউন্সিল, তার মধ্যে নিউকাসল বরাবর তাদের শক্ত ঘাঁটি বলে পরিচিত। পুরো ফল প্রকাশিত হলে, হাত আসন সংখ্যা ৪০০র বেশি দাঁড়াবে বলে মনে করা হচ্ছে। আজ রাতে লন্ডনের মেয়র অফিসের ফলাফল ঘোষিত হবে। রবিবার জানা যাবে, ইউরোপীয় পার্লামেন্ট নির্বাচনের ফল। গতিপ্রকৃতি দেখে বিশেষজ্ঞেরা আঁচ করছেন, এর কোনওটিতেই ব্লেয়ারের পক্ষে ভাল খবর আসার সম্ভাবনা নেই বললেই চলে।

যে সব আসন লেবার পার্টির হাতছাড়া হয়েছে, তারও অনেকগুলিই ব্লেয়ারদের শক্ত জমি। বার্নলে, হেনলে, অক্সফোর্ড, সেন্ট হেলেন-এর মতো আসনও হারাতে হয়েছে তাঁদের। দলের অনেকেই মনে করছেন, ইরাক যুদ্ধে আমেরিকার সঙ্গে জুড়ি বাঁধাই তাঁদের কাল হল। পার্লামেন্ট নির্বাচনের আগে ব্লেয়ারের বদলে অর্ধমন্ত্রী গর্ডন ব্রাউনকে লেবার নেতা হিসেবে ঘোষণা করার বিষয়েও জল্পনা চলছে। বস্তুত ব্লেয়ারকে সরিয়ে নতুন নেতা নির্বাচনের আভাস গত মাসেই দিয়ে ফেলেছিলেন স্বয়ং উপপ্রধানমন্ত্রী জন প্রেসকট। সংবাদপত্রে সে কথা ফাঁস হওয়ায় ব্লেয়ার তড়িৎঘড়ি ঘোষণা করেন, এসবই গুজব। তিনি এখনই তাঁর পদ থেকে সরছেন না। ব্লেয়ারের কট্টর সমর্থক বলে পরিচিত সংস্কৃতি সচিব টেসা জুওয়েল এই ফলাফলকে নেহাতই এক 'সাময়িক ধাক্কা' বলে চালাতে চাইলেও, স্বরাষ্ট্রসচিব ডেভিড ব্লাক্লেট স্বীকার করেন, "বিরাত বিপর্যয় যদি না-ও হয়, এটা আমাদের কাছে অত্যন্ত খারাপ একটা রাত। এটা খুব পরিষ্কার, ইরাক আমাদের যথেষ্ট ক্ষতি করেছে।" গত রাতে ব্লেয়ার বলেন, ইরাক যুদ্ধের ছায়া এই নির্বাচনের উপর অবশ্যই পড়েছে।

ব্লেয়ারের ইরাক নীতি নিয়ে ব্রিটেনবাসী দীর্ঘদিন ধরে ক্ষোভ প্রকাশ করে আসছেন। গত সেপ্টেম্বর মাসে ব্রেন্ট ইস্ট আসনের উপনির্বাচনেও হারতে হয়েছিল লেবার পার্টিতে। প্রতিরক্ষা বিশেষজ্ঞ ডেভিড কেলির আত্মহত্যাও ব্রিটিশ নাগরিকদের মনে একটা বড় ধাক্কা দিয়েছিল। বিবিসি একটি প্রতিবেদনে জানিয়েছিল, 'গোয়েন্দাদের দেওয়া যে তথ্যের ভিত্তিতে ইরাক আক্রমণ করা হয়, তার সত্যতা নিয়ে গোয়েন্দা দফতরেরই অনেকের সন্দেহ ছিল। কেলির মুখ থেকেই এই অসুবিধের কথা জানা গিয়েছে।' তার পরই সরকারি মহলের প্রবল চাপ সইতে না পেরে কেলি আত্মহত্যা করেন বলে অভিযোগ। পরে, এই বিষয়ে হাটন কমিশনের রিপোর্ট অবশ্য ব্লেয়ারের বিরুদ্ধে যায়নি। কিন্তু ব্রিটেনবাসী তা কতটা বিশ্বাস করেছিলেন, তা নিয়ে সন্দেহ থেকেই যায়। কনজারভেটিভ দল কাউন্সিল নির্বাচনের ফলাফলে প্রথম স্থানে উঠে এসেছে। যুদ্ধ-বিরোধী লিবারাল ডেমোক্রেটদের দ্বিতীয় স্থান দখল করা দেখে বিশেষজ্ঞেরা অনুমান করছেন, যদি কনজারভেটিভরাও বিরোধী ভূমিকা নিত, তা হলে তাদের আসন সংখ্যা আরও বাড়ত। অন্য দিকে, লন্ডনের মেয়র পদে রয়েছেন কেন লিভিংস্টোন, যিনি একদা ইরাক যুদ্ধের বিরুদ্ধে সরব ছিলেন। এখন ফিরেছেন লেবার পার্টিতে। তাঁর এই ভোলবদল মানুষ ভাল চোখে নেন কি না, জানার জন্য অপেক্ষা আজ রাত পর্যন্ত।

Blair barrier to immigrants



British PM Tony Blair at a ceremony in Bayeux to commemorate the 60th anniversary of D-Day in Normandy.

Vijay Dutt
London, June 6

WHA
HKA
7/6

THE BRITISH government intends to get tough on immigration applications from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sierra Leone and Nigeria, whom it strangely dubs the "New Commonwealth".

A leaked memo has revealed that Tony Blair, at a highly confidential meeting of senior ministers, agreed with Home Secretary David Blunkett's assessment that a quota system, backed up by tough new restrictions, is needed to check the "dramatic" rise in immigrants from these countries.

Blair, according to a report in *The Sunday Telegraph*, agreed and called for a clampdown to prevent "abuse from the New Commonwealth countries". An announcement should be made within weeks, Blair ordered.

The ministers were aware of the sensitive nature of the move, which effectively limits the numbers of blacks and Asians who could use one of Britain's immigration schemes. Under the heading "points made in discussion", the memo included the observation that the "quotas would require careful han-

dling to avoid accusations of discrimination".

A highly placed diplomat told HT he was surprised that India should be included in the list of "New Commonwealth countries", for it is one of the oldest members and the backbone of the Commonwealth.

The number of applications from India has soared to 40,000 a year and many abuses had been detected. The new quotas will be based on the Commonwealth Holiday Maker (WHM) scheme under which people were let in for two years, subsidising their stays with casual work. Many stay on longer, switching to the more formal system of work permits at the end of their stay. Before the changes, the scheme was almost exclusively applied to younger people from the so-called "Old Commonwealth" — Australians, New Zealanders and Canadians.

A Downing Street spokesman said the proposals for action would be made public soon. "We have found some abuse — but it's not widespread," he said. "If it had been, we would simply close the system down, which is not something we want to do."

UK to tighten immigration law for India, Pak

Press Trust of India 5.9.03

LONDON, June 6. — Britain has decided to tighten the immigration law to restrict immigration from "new Commonwealth" countries like India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nigeria.

A decision in this regard was taken at a recent meeting presided over by Prime Minister Mr Tony Blair and attended among others by home secretary Mr David Blunkett, immigration minister Mr Desmond Browne, trade secretary Ms Patricia Hewitt and foreign secretary Mr Jack Straw.

At the meeting, convened for an immigration "stock taking", Mr Blunkett warned of a "dramatic" rise in applications to come to Britain from "New Commonwealth" countries including India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nigeria and Sierra Leone. "Old Commonwealth" countries are Australia, New Zealand Canada.

What was needed, Mr Blunkett argued, was a quota system, backed up by tough new restrictions.

Mr Blair, according to a report in the Sunday Telegraph, agreed and called for a clampdown to prevent "abuse from the New Commonwealth

countries". An announcement should be made within weeks, Mr Blair ordered. According to the report, a leaked memo signals government's intention to get tough on applications from among others, India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. A Downing Street spokesman said the proposals for action would be made public "soon".

Mr Blunkett had been keen to widen its application to people from "New Commonwealth" nations but, since the reforms had been made, applications that used to run at about 40,000 a year had soared and abuse had been detected.

Security chink allows powder-balloon attack on Blair in House

Associated Press
London, May 19

A PROTESTER hit Prime Minister Tony Blair with a purple powder in the House of Commons on Wednesday, forcing evacuation and an urgent review of security in a chamber already fearful of terrorist attack.

The powder apparently inside two balloons appeared to come from demonstrators situated in a section of the House of Commons gallery reserved for guests of MPs. The powder proved harmless cornflour, thrown by a man with a grudge about child custody rules, but legislators were shaken by the thought that the incident could have been deadly. It was a major security

breach in the House of Commons, which recently put up a bulletproof transparent screen to protect members from possible attacks from the public gallery. MPs could be seen rising en masse and waving their papers, as speaker Michael Martin suspended proceedings and ordered everyone out of the chamber. The incident came just weeks after the screen was installed in front of the rest of the public gallery.

Fathers 4 Justice, a group that campaigns on child custody issues, claimed responsibility for the incident and identified the flour-flinger as Ron Davies, 44, of Worthing, England. Fathers 4 Justice spokesman Matt O'Connor said Davies, who was heard shouting "five years", had

not seen his children during that length of time.

Baroness Golding, a former Labour Party member of the Commons, confirmed she had signed for the two men to enter a VIP gallery, which is not behind the security screen.

"I regret to say that it was two guests of mine who were responsible for the very serious incident in the Commons today", Golding said. "I shall, of course, give every support and cooperation to the authorities who are now investigating". Speaker Michael Martin, speaking as the House resumed its session at 12.30 GMT, said he was suspending the right of members of the Lords to sponsor visitors to the Commons.

Assuring members that

the powder was not harmful, Martin said, "The best thing we can do is get back to business as usual". Blair's office said he was fine and had been keen on returning to the evacuated debating chamber to finish the last 10 minutes of his weekly half-hour question-and-answer session with lawmakers. He wasn't given the chance, however, and the House went on to other business.

But Prime Minister's questions did not resume when members returned to the chamber. "These people have actually done us a favour. This seems to be an innocuous substance and it will highlight the fact that there is a problem with security here", said Conservative Party vice-chairman Charles Hendry.

"It could have been somebody far more frightening". The man who threw the powder was heard shouting "do you realize" and "five years". Blair visibly flinched as he was hit on the left shoulder by the powder.

A second man, who stood in the same gallery, was seen holding up a sheet of letter-size paper, but it wasn't clear what message was on it.

The two men were grabbed by security officers. Lawmakers behind Blair dusted the powder off his back before he left the chamber.

Fathers 4 Justice campaigns on behalf of dads denied access to their children and has drawn attention to the issue with a series of high-profile stunts.



AFP
VULNERABLE TO THREATS? An audio-visual frame provided by the parliamentary recording unit shows British Prime Minister Tony Blair (C) watching a balloon of purple cornflour (left of his head) that was thrown at him during Question Time in the House of Commons on Wednesday.

20 MAY 2004

Britain to end 20-year chill towards China



TO A FRIENDLY FUTURE: Mr Tony Blair (left) with Mr Wen Jiabao. — A file photograph

THE TIMES, LONDON

BEIJING, May 8. — Britain and China have agreed to hold annual heads of government to anchor a new "partnership" between London and Beijing.

The extraordinary re-vamp of relations, which follows two decades of tension over the former British colony of Hong Kong, will be celebrated during a visit to Britain by Mr Wen Jiabao, Prime Minister of China, which starts tomorrow.

Mr Tony Blair, who has been criticised for neglecting China, will become the principal point of contact for the Chinese leadership, taking over a role previously assigned to the Deputy Prime Minister, Mr John Prescott.

By holding annual summits, London accords Beijing a status given to no other nation outside Europe and the USA. The

British PM has long been reluctant to commit himself to regular consultations with anyone other than Nato and EU leaders.

In his first six years in office, he visited China only once, in 1998. The leaders of Germany, France, Russia and USA have maintained much closer contact with Beijing. The change in Mr Blair's attitude follows his second visit to Beijing last July and reflects China's growing importance as a trade power.

During talks with Mr Wen, Mr Blair is expected to raise the continuing doubts over the future of Hong Kong. Last month, the Foreign Office gave warning that the territory's "high degree of autonomy" was being eroded by Beijing. Mr Blair may also sign a memorandum of understanding on how to deal with illegal immigrants from China and raise human rights issues.

UK crackdown on illegal immigrants

By Rashmee Z Ahmed
TIMES NEWS NETWORK

London: Indian trade may be booming but there's one most unwelcome export — the anything between 3,000 and 8,000 illegal immigrants to the UK every year. Now, the UK has sent an urgent message to all bogus Britain-bound brides and grooms from Punjab, fake students and potential illegal immigrants: stay home, we are on to you.

The generalised announcement, which does not mention nationalities, is part of Britain's biggest crackdown on illegal immigration. India is privately acknowledged by both countries to be an unwitting exporter of thousands of illegal immigrants.

The British crackdown comes just 10 weeks after Punjab police accused a British Indian woman of defrauding a string of slaving Punjabi husbands and fiances of lakhs of rupees with the promise to secure their entry into the UK. Under Britain's new rules for Britons marrying foreign nationals, only designated registry offices can authorise the union. Registrars can refuse to marry suspect couples.

The case of Glaswegian Jaswinder Kaur hit the headlines during British Home Secretary David Blunkett's breakthrough end-January immigration summit with Deputy Prime Minister Advani. Observers say the resulting first-ever Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on illegal immigration was an admission of fact that Indian ille-

NEW RULES:

Students: Immediate implementation of a planned investigation into addresses masquerading as educational establishments.

► An accreditation and monitoring scheme to ensure genuine educational establishments are properly registered by the yearend. Once the list is established, student visas will not be issued to attend colleges not on the list.

► A requirement to notify the Home Office when students do not turn up for courses and consultation on how best to implement this.

On Marriages: Allowing only designated registrar offices to authorise marriages involving foreign nationals, working closely with the immigration service. This will enable a targeted, major new enforcement effort against sham marriages.

► Changes to marriage laws to empower registrars to refuse to conduct a marriage suspected to be carried out for the purposes of illegal immigration while it is investigated.

gal immigration does little to promote brand India.

Navdeep Suri, spokesman for the Indian High Commission said that the two sides are working on this issue. But, in an indication of the logistical difficulties in ascertaining if illegal immigrants are in fact Indian, British Home Office officials

told TNN they had no nationality-wise breakdown of illegal immigration statistics.

Informed estimates suggest roughly one per cent of Britain's annual 300,000-500,000 Indian visitors overstay their welcome, simply to disappear. Several thousand more smuggle themselves into Britain via different European and Russian Federation routes.

In October, the UK overrode Indian protestations and insisted Indians transiting through the UK needed transit visas because there were too many inadmissible airport arrivals. Commentators said it was bureaucratic for a bleak truth — too many Indians in transit simply wandered out of Heathrow to disappear.

Graham James, director of the UK's Border Control and Enforcement is on record to say Indians are among the main nationalities of illegal workers. Even so, no one is sure the newest British clampdown on sham marriages and non-existent college courses will be enough to stem the illegal influx from India.

Observers told TNN the UK's refusal to classify India as a safe country, whose citizens need not seek political asylum in the West, may be an obstacle to stemming the Indian illegal flow.

But John Ruddock of the Home Office insisted European human rights tests determined India's exclusion from the so-called safe or white list of countries. Asylum claims from safe list countries, which astonishingly include Sri Lanka and Bangladesh are presumed to be false at the outset.

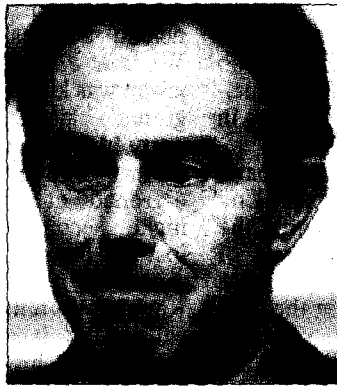
Blair U-turn... now referendum on EU

Associated Press

LONDON April 20. — Prime Minister Mr Tony Blair has decided to call a British referendum on the European Union's constitution, his office said Tuesday, confirming an abrupt reversal of policy by a government which had been adamantly opposed to such a vote.

Mr Blair's U-turn, the most significant since he came to power in 1997, follows months of pressure by the main opposition Conservative Party, which claims the treaty will undermine Britain's sovereignty.

Several national newspaper have also taken up the call for a referendum. "Blair's EU humiliation," the *Daily Mail's* front page headline said



Tuesday.

The government had argued against a national poll, insisting that the constitution, which aims to streamline decision making in the EU, would not fundamentally alter Britain's relationship with the bloc.

The reversal in allowing the first nationwide poll since

1975 is a sign that Blair's authority has eroded. Since the Iraq war, Mr Blair's personal ratings have slumped and he is struggling to regain public trust.

"It is a sign of weakness," said Mr John Curtice, professor of politics at Strathclyde University.

Opinion polls find that many Britons are ambivalent or skeptical about closer European integration, fearing the constitution will create a European super state, and a referendum on the issue is likely to be tight.

Denmark, Ireland and Luxembourg have already announced they will hold referendums on the constitution and several other countries, including are likely to do so.

THE STATESMAN 21 APR 2004

ROW OVER UNIVERSITY FEE HIKE

Blair faces revolt within party

WKO

SF-2
1/A

Associated Press

LONDON, March 31. — Mr Tony Blair faced a rebellion within his governing Labour Party today over plans to increase university tuition fees for students.

The British Prime Minister has acknowledged that his authority is on the line, but insists the government must press to increase higher education funding and boost Britain's skills base.

The legislation narrowly scraped through the House of Commons in January, but must face another vote today before it can be passed to the House of Lords for further consideration.

Education secretary Mr Charles Clarke has appealed to rebels to back the government and said the vote would be tight. "It is going to be a close vote," he told BBC radio. Mr Clarke said a couple of the 72 Labour lawmakers who voted against the Bill in January would back the government, but he added that some past supporters were now voting no.

Rebels, however, said

Legal status for gay couples

LONDON, March 31. — The government today published proposals to give gay couples legal status in Britain for the first time, with rights similar to those enjoyed by married partners. The Civil Partnership Bill only applies to same-sex couples, who would form a civil partnership by signing a register before an official and two witnesses. There would be a formal, court-based process for dissolution of a partnership. — AP

they expected the government to narrowly win today. One Labour MP, associated with a rebel Amendment, said some colleagues were reluctant to vote against the government, with local government and EU parliament polls in June.

About 200 students waving placards reading "Give Way Tony" demonstrated outside parliament. "The proposal is ridiculous as students are in so much debt already," a student said.

Under the proposals, universities would be able to charge students up to £3,000 a year, to be paid after they leave school and start earning. Colleges currently charge a flat fee of £1,125 which is paid upfront. The government says the increase would provide an extra £1 billion a year for higher education.

In an effort to win over rebels, the government has also pledged scholarships for poorer students and promised to set up a regulator to help ensure that more working-class people enter higher education.

Some Labour MPs view the legislation as a betrayal of a 2001 poll promise not to hike tuition fees. Many in the party also fear that plans to let universities set their own fees will create a marketplace in education, with poorer students choosing what and where to study based on what they can afford. Labour lawmaker Mr Ian Gibson has offered an Amendment which would scrap the variable fee element, but keep deferment of payment and scholarships.

THE STATESMAN

7 APR 2004

UK chain raids throw up explosives

Gunfire rocks Tashkent, 20 die

London, March 30 (Reuters): Police arrested eight men and seized a cache of explosives during raids at dawn today in Britain's biggest anti-terror operation since the September 11 attacks of 2001.

With Europe already on a high state of alert after the Madrid bombings, British police pounced in 24 separate raids, seizing more than half-a-tonne of ammonium nitrate fertiliser, which is prime bomb-making material.

The eight suspects were believed to be Muslims of Pakistani origin, police sources said. "There was enough explosive material to launch an attack as big as the devastating IRA bomb that hit London's financial district in 1996 and killed two people. The fertiliser was similar to that used in the 2002 Bali bombings — but there was no clue about possible targets.

Britain, Washington's closest ally in the "war on terror" and in toppling Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein, has long feared it could be a prime target for Islamic extremists. London's police chief has repeatedly said he believes an attack is inevitable. Britain has been on high alert since the September 11 suicide plane attacks on New York and Washington.

Peter Clarke, head of Britain's anti-terror branch, said the fertiliser was discovered in a two-metre high plastic bag in a west London warehouse.



British police officers stand guard outside a west London warehouse where half-a-tonne of ammonium nitrate fertiliser was found. (Reuters)

"Part of the investigation will focus on the purchase, storage and intended use of that material," Clarke said. But he did stress the operation was not linked to investigations into the co-ordinated train bombings in Madrid on March 11, which killed nearly 200 people, or to Irish extremists.

Clarke said the eight men, all British and aged between 17 and 32, were arrested on suspicion of preparing to carry out acts of terrorism. The co-ordinated dawn raids were carried out by 700 officers from five police forces and the security services. "It was the biggest counter-

terrorism raid in recent years," one police source said.

Some were arrested near London's Heathrow and Gatwick airports but there was no evidence to suggest either was a target. Local residents were not entirely surprised.

"I could see how a terrorist would choose a place like this," said Sam Cocking, 31, who rents a unit in the large self-storage warehouse in Hanwell, just a few miles from Heathrow, where the ammonium nitrate was found.

"People can just come and go as they please."

Ammonium nitrate would normally be used in large-scale

bomb attacks on buildings rather than by suicide bombers, according to Alex Standish, editor of *Jane's Intelligence Digest*.

"You may have had a series of truck bombings on the agenda, but certainly that is not suicide bomber material," he said.

Around 500 people have been held in Britain under its sweeping anti-terror laws since September 11, 2001, with about 90 charged with terrorism-related offences.

Manila attack foiled

The Philippines said today it had foiled a "Madrid-level" terror attack on shops and trains in the capital Manila by arresting four suspected Islamic militants and seizing a large amount of explosives.

The suspected plot by members of the Abu Sayyaf group comes as campaigning heats up ahead of May 10 national elections in which President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, a firm ally in the US-led war on terror, is seeking a new term. "We have prevented a Madrid-level attack on the metropolis by capturing an explosive cache of 36 kg of TNT which was intended to be used for bombing malls and trains in Metro Manila," Arroyo said.

Officials said the four suspected militants, including several involved in high-profile kidnappings of foreigners by the Abu Sayyaf, had been arrested in raids in Manila last weekend and yesterday.

Tashkent, March 30 (Reuters): Uzbek special forces attacked a suspected Islamic militant hideout in a Tashkent suburb today killing 16 fighters, three police officers and one resident dead, a day after bomb blasts killed 19 in the former Soviet Central Asian country.

Yesterday's blasts, two caused by female suicide bombers, raised concern in Washington which uses an airbase here for operations in Afghanistan. Uzbek forces today struck what they called a "terrorist group" in a city suburb. "We have counted five bodies of the terrorists and police say there are seven more lying in the entrance hall," a local reporter allowed on the scene after fighting ended said.

One Islamist group accused by the hardline secularist government of President Islam Karimov of carrying out yesterday's attack denied the charge. It said government had orchestrated the blasts in Tashkent and the ancient city of Bukhara to justify a crackdown on legitimate political opposition.

Whoever carried out the attacks, the response came quickly. "They are barricaded inside an apartment block and police fired several volleys from rocket-propelled grenades at them," a witness said as the attack was mounted in a residential area. "The area has been heavily blocked by heavy army trucks reinforced by police cordons," he said.

The former Soviet Central Asian state has drawn harsh criticism from western countries and rights groups for its tough tactics against Islamic opposition, including accusations of widespread torture.

The region, also including Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, is regarded in Russia as the "soft underbelly" of the former Soviet Union. Moscow, fighting separatists in its mainly Muslim region of Chechnya, shares Tashkent's concern about any Islamist activity or infiltration into the area from Afghanistan. Zakirov said the government had the situation in hand. "There's no panic among the population. All industrial enterprises and state institutions are working as usual. The situation is under the control of the authorities," he said.

In Washington, White House spokesman Scott McClellan said the US stood firmly behind its Central Asian ally.

UK team meets Shabir, Malik

MUFTI ISLAH
SRINAGAR, MARCH 25

A TEAM of officials from the British High Commission, who are currently in Kashmir, today met with senior separatist leader Shabir Ahmad Shah.

At the meeting, British High Commissioner Sir Michael Arthur asked Shah, who heads the Democratic Freedom Party, why his party has chosen to stay out of the

talks process at a time when the Hurriyat Conference has entered into a dialogue with New Delhi. To which Shah said that though he was a pioneer in starting a composite dialogue on Kashmir, New Delhi has time and again displayed insincerity and betrayed him, sources present at the meeting told *The Indian Express*.

According to the sources, Shah also said that while his party and the Jamiat Islami and leaders like Yasin Malik, Syed Ali Shah Geelani (both have

opposed the Hurriyat-Centre negotiations), too, favour a dialogue, all of them need some kind of a guarantee from a neutral country that New Delhi would be "sincere".

Shah also told the British High Commission officials that if New Delhi does not want the UK or US or EU as mediator, one of these countries should at least "monitor" talks.

"I will be talking to New Delhi soon to ask if you can monitor the talks," Shah told Arthur. "We can start talking af-

ter the polls are over. The India-Pakistan talks are also scheduled around that time. Let us see what happens after that but monitoring the talks is imperative," the sources quoted Shah as having told the officials.

When the High Commissioner pointed out that the Maulvi Abbas Ansari group had already started talks with the Centre, Shah retorted saying: "Theirs was a hasty decision... Leave aside the general council, the Hurriyat did not even consult its executive con-

stituents properly before taking the decision to talk."

Asked if the separatists would participate in the coming elections, Shah told Arthur that though he believes in electoral exercises, polls have never solved the Kashmir problem. The separatist leader also highlighted the human rights violations allegedly perpetrated by security forces.

Sources said the team later met JKLF chief Yasin Malik who also stressed on the human rights violations.

HO-16
26/3
TRIPOLI VISIT / WAR AGAINST TERRORISM

Libya can be partner, says Blair

TRIPOLI, MARCH 25. Libya can be an important partner in the war against terror if it fulfills its pledge to scrap its weapons of mass destruction, said the British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, on Thursday following a historic meeting with Muammar Qadhafi.

Mr. Blair lauded Col. Qadhafi's progress in dismantling his chemical, nuclear and biological programmes, under plans he announced in December, and said his cooperation with Britain and the United States sent a strong signal to the Arab world.

"Libya's voluntary and open implementation of the decision of (December) gives us real hope we can build a new relationship with it for the modern world," Mr. Blair said.

"I was particularly struck by Col. Qadhafi's insistence at our earlier meeting not only of Libya's determination to carry on down this path of cooperation, but also his recognition that Libya's own future is best

secured by a new relationship with the outside world and of a common cause with us in the fight against Al-Qaeda extremism and terrorism, which threatens not just the West but Arab nations, too."

In return for Libya's cooperation, Mr. Blair said Britain would strengthen cultural links and offer the North African state military cooperation.

Without providing details, Mr. Blair said he would appoint a British general as the U.K. defence coordinator for Libya "that will offer Libya a chance of a new military relationship with the U.K."

Mr. Blair spoke to reporters after an hour and a half's meeting with Col. Qadhafi, the first by a British leader since Col. Qadhafi seized power in 1969. The visit marked a major step back into the international mainstream for the North African state.

After a red carpet welcome, Col. Qadhafi and Mr. Blair met in a tent in the desert, a

herd of camels nearby. The two leaders sat on low chairs, chatting through an interpreter in a tent hung with green and yellow tapestries of camels and palm trees.

"It is good to be here at last after so many months," Mr. Blair said.

Col. Qadhafi responded initially in Arabic, then in English: "You did a lot of fighting on this issue and seem exhausted." Britain has taken the diplomatic lead in ending Libya's international isolation.

"I think it is a very important visit," said the Libyan Foreign Minister, Abdel-Rahman Shalqam. "Libya and Britain play a very important role in this region of North Africa and the African continent. We have the same obligations. We are going to exchange our views and analyses together." Mr. Shalqam said Libya had warned of the dangers of Al-Qaeda in the 1980s and 1990s "when Europe and even America were supporting these people." — AP

THE HINDU

26 MAR 2004

UK freezes Hamas assets

PTI & AP

LONDON, March 24. — Britain today ordered the Bank of England to freeze assets belonging to five senior members of the Hamas, including those of its new leader Abdel Aziz Rantisi.

“Chancellor (of the Exchequer) Gordon Brown today instructed the Bank of England to direct financial institutions that any funds which they hold for or on behalf of five senior members of Hamas must be frozen,” the Treasury said in a statement. “This action has been taken because the Treasury have reasonable grounds for suspecting that four of the individuals are, or may be persons who facilitate or participate in the commission of acts of terrorism and Abdel Aziz Rantisi is or may be a person, who commits, facilitates or participates in such acts.”

Besides Rantisi, the other named are Musa Abu Marzouk, Imad Khalil Al-Alami, Usama Hamdan and Khalid Mishaal.

UNSC debates killing

Israel clashed with the Palestinians and Islamic countries in the UN Security Council at an open meeting to debate the targeted killing of Hamas leader Sheik Ahmed Yassin.

Israel's need to defend its citizens forced it to kill Yassin, the Israeli ambassador told the Security Council last night, while the Palestinians and other countries said the assassination pushed West Asia peace further from reach.

Israeli ambassador Mr Dan Gillerman said Israel was obliged to defend its citizens and the Palestinian leadership by shel-

'Target Sharon'

GAZA, March 24. — Hamas wants to assassinate Israeli Prime Minister Mr Ariel Sharon in retaliation for Israel's killing of the Islamic group's spiritual leader, a Hamas leader said in an interview posted on the internet today. Khaled Mashaal, a Damascus-based Hamas leader, said: “I hope that the mujahideen can retaliate against this awful crime by targeting the most prominent Zionist leaders ... including Mr Sharon.” In another development, new Hamas leader Abdel Aziz Rantisi today assured that his outfit has no plans to attack US targets, backing off earlier threats against Washington following Yassin's assassination.

tering Yassin gave it no choice but to kill him. “To characterize him as a spiritual leader is to attempt to characterise Osama bin Laden as a Mother Teresa...” The Palestinians, however, warned that “a big line has been crossed”. Chief Palestinian delegate Mr Nasser al-Kidwa said: “It was an insane crime that has very dangerous indications...”

Boy bomber held: Israeli forces stopped a Palestinian boy wearing a suicide bomb belt from crossing into Israel from the West Bank town, police said today, a report adds from Nablus. Witnesses said the boy appeared to be between 10 and 12 years old. Israel radio said he could be as young as eight.

USA closes embassy: The USA today closed its embassy in the UAE after receiving a specific threat against it. In a related development, The State Department has issued a worldwide travel caution and advised Americans to leave Gaza as soon as it is safe to do so.

25 MAR 2004

THE STATESMAN

New British asylum law sparks row

By Hasan Suroor

LONDON, MARCH 4. In a controversial move, which has infuriated civil rights groups and senior judges, the British Government has introduced legislation to deny failed asylum-seekers and immigrants the right to seek a judicial review by barring courts from hearing appeals against executive decisions.

Under the new Asylum and Immigration Bill, already approved by the Commons and to be taken up in the Lords shortly, the buck will stop with the proposed Asylum and Immigration Tribunal with no further channel of appeal available to those whose applications have been rejected.

While civil liberties' campaigners have called it an attack on human rights and the princi-

ple of open justice, judges see it as a veiled attempt to curb judicial independence and, significantly, the strongest criticism has come from Britain's Chief Justice Lord Woolf, otherwise regarded as being close to the British Prime Minister, Tony Blair.

In an unprecedented public attack, Lord Woolf has said that the move to block courts from ruling on asylum and immigration decision is a "blot on the reputation of the government" and could result in a loss of public confidence in its professed commitment to the rule of law.

"What is the use of courts if you cannot access them", he said describing the relevant clause as being "fundamentally in conflict with the rule of law." He disclosed that during consultations with the Home Office

before the bill was drafted judges had strongly opposed the idea. Yet, the Government had gone ahead and included it in the bill.

"...Our advice was that a clause of this nature now included in the bill...should not be contemplated by any government if it had respect for the rule of law," he said.

He warned that the move could bring the judiciary, the executive and the legislature into 'conflict'. "I am not over-dramatising the position if I indicate that if this clause were to become law, it would be so inconsistent with the spirit of mu-

tual respect between the different arms of government that it could be the catalyst for a campaign for a written constitution," he said adding that he hoped the contentious proposal would have a "short shrift" in the Lords.

His remarks in the course of a lecture at Cambridge University caught the headlines with commentators warning of an impending 'confrontation' between the Blair Government and judiciary. They have been increasingly at loggerheads with each other over a range of issues, especially relating to legal reforms.

British intelligence 'spied on UN chief'

Associated Press

LONDON, Feb. 26. — British intelligence agents spied on UN Secretary-General Mr Kofi Annan in the run up to the Iraq war, a former member of Mr Tony Blair's Cabinet said today. The British Prime Minister refused to say whether the allegation was true, but said the former minister had been "deeply irresponsible".

Ms Clare Short, who resigned as international development secretary following the campaign to topple Saddam Hussein, said she had read transcripts of Mr Annan's conversations while she was a member of the

government. "The UK in this time was also spying on Mr Kofi Annan's office and getting reports from him about what was going on," Ms Short said in an interview with BBC radio.

The charge dominated Mr Blair's monthly news conference. "I'm not going to comment on the operations of our security services," Mr Blair said. "But I do say this: we act in accordance with domestic and international law, and we act in the best interests of this country, and our security services are a vital part of the protection of this country."

"So I'm not going to comment on their operations, not directly, not indirectly. That should not be taken,

of seeing evidence of eavesdropping. "These things are done. And in the case of Mr Annan's office, it's been done for some time," she said.

Asked if Britain was involved, she said: "Well I know, I have seen transcripts of Mr Annan's conversations. In fact I have had conversations with him in the run up to war thinking 'Oh dear, there will be a transcript of this and people will see what he and I are saying..."

Asked explicitly whether British spies had been instructed to carry out operations within the UN on people such as Mr Annan, she said: "Yes, absolutely."

Ms Short's comments came as she was interviewed about the decision

made yesterday to drop legal proceedings against a former intelligence employee who leaked a confidential memo raising concerns about spying in the UN.

Ms Katharine Gun (29), a former Mandarin translator with Britain's Government Communications Headquarters listening station, leaked a memo from US intelligence officials asking their British counterparts to spy on members of the UN Security Council before the Iraq war.

The memo asked the British intelligence agency for help bugging detainees' home and office telephones and e-mails. At the time, the USA was seeking to win Security Council backing for war in Iraq.



Ms Clare Short

'The UK in this time was also spying on Mr Kofi Annan's office and getting reports from him about what was going on'



Mr Kofi Annan

as I say, as an indication about the truth of any particular allegations. And I think the fact that those alle-

gations were made, I think, is deeply irresponsible." In her interview, Ms Short spoke

27 FEB 2004

THE STATESMAN

Target BBC

Is London about to shoot itself in the foot?

One doesn't know yet whether leaked government plans to break up the BBC are meant to be a warning shot fired across the broadcasting corporation's bows, after the controversial reports filed by journalist Andrew Gilligan which claimed that the government had "sexed up" intelligence reports on the threat posed by Iraq, or whether it means to seriously follow through.

The break-up plans come after the Hutton committee report, which rather one-sidedly rapped the BBC for the David Kelly affair while letting the government off the hook. But Prime Minister Tony Blair could turn this victory into a public relations disaster for himself if he were to attempt to capitalise on the Hutton report by disbanding the BBC. Despite occasional misdemeanours the Beeb has a reputation for fairness and accuracy, both inside and outside Britain, that is far greater than that of either governments or politicians. It has a unique funding structure — it derives the bulk of its budget not directly from the government but from licence fees paid by British TV owners — which frees it from dependence on either government or advertisers. Its consequent credibility is an invaluable British asset, making it an element of what Joseph Nye describes as "soft power", meaning a nation's ability to persuade others of the desirability of its way of life without applying instruments of coercion. It is watched widely even in the US, home to many media empires, because Americans may be tired of how deferential their own journalists can be. To be sure, it may have made some mistakes lately. Lord Hutton has pointed to certain errors and lapses in Gilligan's report — Gilligan cannot, for example, back his account of his interview of David Kelly with recorded tapes or even his own notes. But there is considerable evidence that he was at least half-right, in that the intelligence reports were doctored by London to buttress its case for war, not least because no WMDs have been found subsequently in Iraq.

None of this is taken into account by the Hutton report, believed by a large proportion of the British public to be a "whitewash". The BBC has had its run-ins with London before — Margaret Thatcher had her knives out for it after its reporting of the Belgrano incident during the Falklands war. But not even Thatcher went as far as privatising or breaking up the Beeb. London has already had its revenge on the "sexing up" charge — Gilligan, as well as the chairman and the director-general of BBC, have handed in their resignations. To proceed further and dismantle the BBC over what amounts to a reporting misdemeanour, is extreme and could give rise to a public backlash against Labour.

It would also affect Britain's standing in the world — its soft power has eroded already with the violence and deception over Iraq, and it hasn't that much hard power left since the dismantling of its empire. Neither do any of the other proposals, such as bringing the BBC under the broadcasting watchdog Ofcom, or sharing its licence fees with other broadcasters, hold water. The former would subject it to government censorship, the latter to unfair competition from other broadcasters whose coffers are loaded anyway with advertising revenues. Whatever London does, it cannot afford to be seen as scapegoating the BBC for its own foreign policy fiascos.

18 FEB 2004

THE STATESMAN

Iraqgate-II hits Blair

Britain spied on UN members

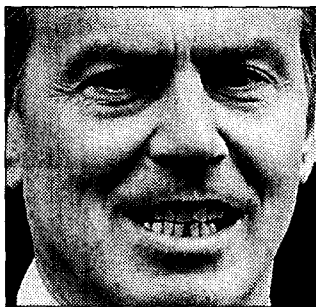
Agencies
London, February 8

BRITAIN'S INTELLIGENCE services helped the US spy on UN Security Council delegations ahead of crucial deliberations about the Iraq war, *The Observer* said on Sunday. China, a permanent member of the UNSC, was most likely among the countries targeted.

Translators and analysts at the Government Communications Headquarters, Britain's electronic intelligence monitoring centre, were ordered to cooperate with a US espionage "surge" on UNSC delegations after a request from the US National Security Agency in end-January 2003. This was to help smooth the way for the UN resolution authorising war in Iraq.

GCHQ translator, Katherine Gun, 29, was sacked by GCHQ in June after *The Observer* printed a separate memo from US intelligence purportedly asking for help in spying on delegations from some "swing nations" from Angola, Cameroon, Chile, Bulgaria, Guinea and Pakistan.

Katherine faces trial after leaking details of the US request. She was hired by the surveillance centre as an expert translator of Mandarin, China's official language. Documents of this level of secrecy



Tony Blair
Caught in the spy act?

are circulated on a strict "need-to-know" basis. Security experts have said that it is highly unlikely that someone as junior as Gun would have seen the memo had she not been expected to use her language expertise.

The information was intended for US Secretary of State Colin Powell before his presentation on WMDs to the UNSC.

Sources close to the intelligence services have now confirmed that the request from the security agency was "acted on" by the British authorities. It is also known that the operation caused significant disquiet in the intelligence community on both sides of the Atlantic. The revelation also raises serious questions for Foreign Secretary Jack Straw, who has overall responsibility for GCHQ.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES 8 FEB 2004

Blair admission on Iraq dossier

The Times, London

LONDON, Feb. 5. — Mr Tony Blair admitted yesterday that he had asked the Commons to approve war against Iraq without knowing that the 45-minutes claim in the Downing Street dossier referred only to battlefield weapons.

Although Mr Geoff Hoon, defence secretary, and Robin Cook, former foreign secretary, were aware at the time that the claim did not refer to long-range weapons, the Prime Minister did not.

Mr Blair's disclosure in the Commons reopened the row over the handling of Intelligence just as he was trying to draw a line under it by setting up an inquiry to report in the summer. It came during a Commons debate that had to be suspended by the Speaker while protesters in the public gallery continually interrupted the Prime Minister's speech with shouts of "murderer" and "white-wash". Seven people were arrested.

Mr Cook, also speaking in the Commons debate, cast doubt over Mr Blair's statement, saying that he had been surprised by it.

He said that in his resignation speech, he had made the point that they were talking about battlefield weapons. "I find it difficult to recon-

Hoon plays down Intelligence reports

LONDON, Feb. 5. — British defense secretary Mr Geoff Hoon today played down suggestions that Mr Tony Blair was not fully informed about the details of key Intelligence reports in the lead-up to war in Iraq.

Mr Hoon, who has publicly stated that he knew what the claim referred to, said the claim in the September 2002 dossier "was not a matter that we greatly relied on". "I do not recall at the time this being a major matter of controversy," he told Sky TV. "I don't recall at the time any great debate about what kind of weapons system was involved."

Mr Hoon faced a grilling about Iraq on two fronts today — before the House of Commons' Defence Select Committee, and then in a meeting with families of six military policemen killed by a mob in Iraq last June. — AP



Bush likens Blair to Churchill

WASHINGTON, Feb. 5. — Mr George W Bush has lavished praise on Mr Tony Blair, likening him to Winston Churchill.

"In his determination to do the right thing and not the easy thing, I see the spirit of Churchill in Tony Blair," he said yesterday in a speech to open a US Library of Congress exhibition on the late British leader.

Lauding Churchill for his role in World War II, Mr Bush said "history has been kind to Winston Churchill, as it usually is to those who help to save the world". "A sense of fellow-

ship and common purpose between our two nations continues to these days. I've also been privileged to know a fine British leader, a man of conscience, and unshakable determination," he said. — PTI

told the Hutton inquiry, however, that it referred only to tactical battlefield weapons such as shells and mortars and not long-range ballistic missiles, as had been widely assumed in press reports at the time.

Mr Michael Howard, Conservative leader, said the media's misinterpretation of the 45-minutes claim should provide one of the lessons arising from the Hutton inquiry. He asked: "When newspapers published headlines such as *45 Minutes from Attack*, should the government not have made it clear the claim in the dossier referred to battlefield weapons?"

cile what I knew and what I am sure the Prime Minister knew at the time we had the vote in March."

Ministers later played down Mr Blair's comment, claiming that he had not referred to the 45-minutes claim in his speech on 18 March in the war debate and that it had never been a big part of the government's case in the months after it was highlighted in the Iraq dossier of September 2002.

The dossier said Iraq had chemical and biological weapons capable of being deployed within 45 minutes.

Mr John Scarlett, Joint Intelligence Committee chairman, had

I misunderstood 45-minute claim in Iraq dossier: Blair

London: British Prime Minister Tony Blair has said he had misunderstood a key part of an intelligence dossier on Iraq which he used to persuade a sceptical nation to back a war to oust Saddam Hussein.

Mr Blair told the House of Commons he had been unaware that the controversial "45-minute" claim in the government's September 2002 Iraq dossier referred only to tactical battlefield weapons, and not long-range ballistic missiles.

In a debate interrupted by anti-war protesters, Mr Blair said he had not known what weapons were being referred to by the claim—that Saddam could deploy some chemical and biological weapons within 45 minutes—when Britain voted narrowly to back the war. "I have already indicated exactly when this came to my attention. It

wasn't before the debate on March 18 last year," he said.

However, Mr Blair, the staunchest international ally of US President George W. Bush in the Iraq conflict, defended the claim's inclusion in the dossier. "If there were chemical or biological or nuclear battlefield weapons, that most certainly would be a weapon of mass destruction and the idea that their use would not threaten the region's stability I find somewhat eccentric," he said.

Mr Blair's disclosure comes a day after he ordered an independent inquiry to probe the quality of the intelligence used to justify the war. AFP

Blair govt ignored reports: Expert

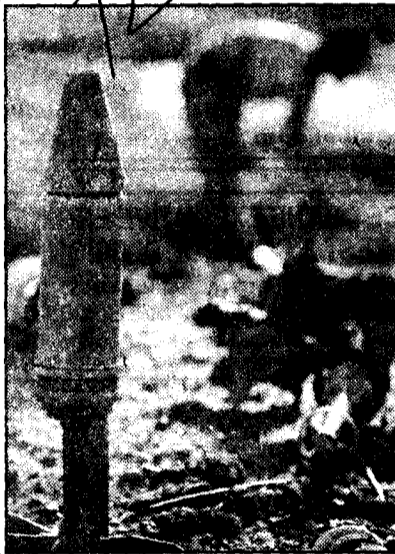
KATHERINE BALDWIN
LONDON, FEBRUARY 4

A FORMER intelligence official tore apart the British government's case for the Iraq war even as Prime Minister Tony Blair tried to quell the furor over Iraq's missing weapons. A day after Blair set up an inquiry into apparent intelligence failings over Iraq, arms expert Brian Jones blasted the government saying that it had overruled intelligence analysts to present a "misleading" pre-war dossier on Iraq's banned weapons.

The comments by Jones, a former Ministry of Defence expert, fuelled the debate over Iraq, which showed no sign of abating despite Blair's announcement on Tuesday of an independent probe. They will frustrate Blair's attempts to draw a line under one of the most gruelling periods of his premiership and come as the Prime Minister prepares for another grilling in parliament.

"In my view, the expert intelligence analysts of the Defence Intelligence Staff were overruled in the preparation of the dossier in September 2002, resulting in a presentation that was misleading about Iraq's capabilities," Jones wrote in *The Independent*.

Blair's critics said Jones' remarks raised further doubts over the justification he gave for war — namely Iraq's lethal weapons — and over the conclusions of a senior judge who last week exonerated Blair of exaggerating the threat from Iraq.



A man digs at a newly discovered mass grave near Shalamcha village on Wednesday. Military uniforms, ammunition and destroyed military vehicles were found near the graves, witnesses said. Reuters

Blair emerged whiter-than-white from judge Lord Hutton's inquiry into last July's suicide of scientist David Kelly, who killed himself after being outed as the source of a BBC report that claimed Blair had "sexed up" evidence of Iraq's weapons.

Blair may have hoped that, after Hutton, his inquiry into Iraq intelligence would

have finally silenced his critics.

But large parts of the media and the public branded Hutton's report a "white-wash" and Blair's opponents say the new inquiry, chaired by Lord Butler, is too limited and will not examine the way politicians presented intelligence on Iraq to the public. Jones gave Blair's opponents more ammunition on Wednesday, just as Blair prepared for a parliamentary debate on Hutton.

"If the government hoped that the Butler inquiry was going to be no re-run of Hutton, I think it's pretty clear that Dr Jones and others of similar view are going to prevent that happening," Menzies Campbell of the Opposition Liberal Democrats said. Jones stunned the Hutton inquiry last summer when he said he had complained to his superiors over the strength of language in the Iraq dossier. But his latest comments go further.

Jones called on Blair to publish the intelligence behind the government's claim in the September dossier that Iraq could launch an attack within 45 minutes of an order to do so. That intelligence, he said, was shown only to a small circle of officials.

Opposition Conservative Party leader Michael Howard, who has accepted Hutton's report and has backed the new inquiry, said "it would be foolish" not to take into account any new evidence that came to light.

—Reuters

WHD
BANNED WEAPONS / 'A U-TURN BY GOVERNMENT'

Blair orders probe into intelligence

By Hasan Suroor

LONDON, FEB. 3. The British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, bowed to mounting pressure and on Tuesday announced an independent inquiry into intelligence claims about Iraq's alleged weapons of mass destruction before the war.

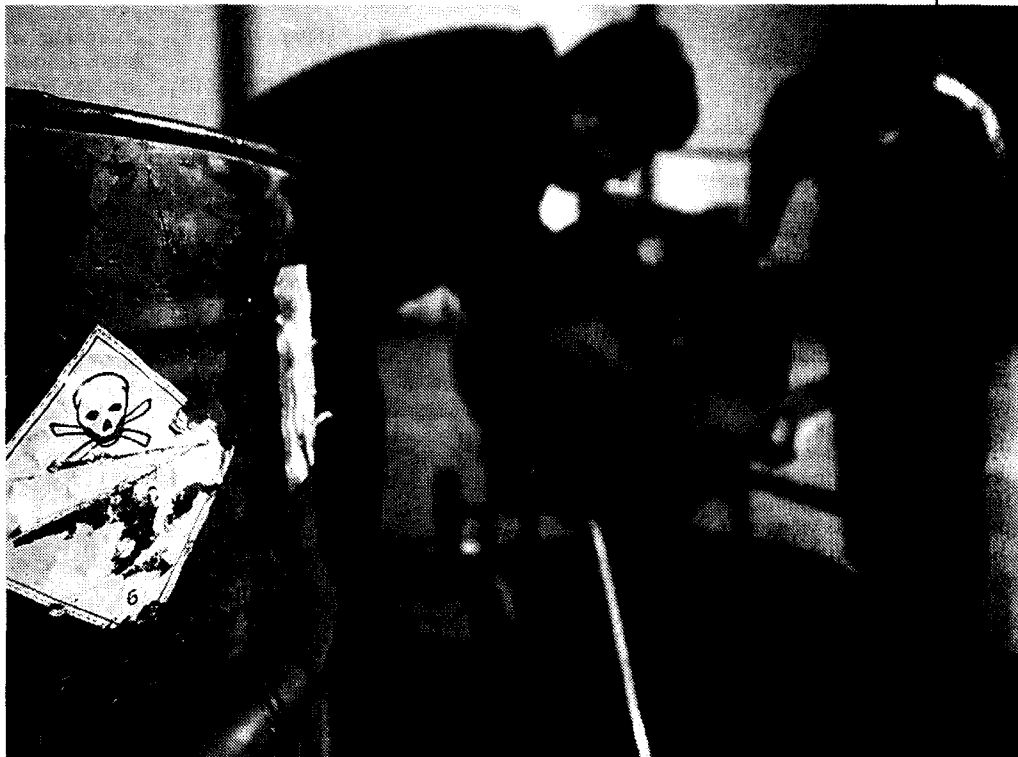
But within hours, there was a controversy over its terms of reference after the Government rejected the Opposition demand that the inquiry should also examine whether the intelligence was put to political use. The Government claimed that the issue had already been 'comprehensively' dealt with by the Hutton inquiry which last week cleared it of the charge of "sexing up" intelligence to justify the invasion.

But the Liberal Democrats said they would not support the inquiry in protest.

The inquiry, to be conducted by a committee of cross-party senior MPs, will be headed by a former Cabinet Secretary, Lord Butler, regarded as an 'establishment' man and a safe pair of hands for the Government.

It will have a limited remit — basically to determine why the intelligence, which prompted the invasion of Iraq, proved to be wrong with no weapons of mass destruction having been found so far.

Mr. Blair, who made the announcement while appearing before a committee of MPs, insisted that the decision to go to war was 'right' and said whatever be the findings of the inquiry, he would "not accept" that the decision to remove Saddam Hussein was wrong. The inquiry, he said, was needed because



Raw materials being mixed for the production of herbicides at a factory in Fallujah, Iraq, in this file photo. United Nations experts searched the factory on December 8, 2002, for banned weapons.

it appeared that the Iraq Survey Group (ISG), which had been searching the weapons, would take some time to produce its final report.

"I think it is right, as a result of what David Kay has said, and the fact that the Iraq Survey Group now probably would not report, in the very near term, its final report, that we have a look at the intelligence that we received and whether it was accurate or not," he said referring to the recent statement of Dr. Kay,

former head of ISG, that intelligence agencies appeared to get it wrong about Iraq's WMDs.

Later in a statement in the Commons, the Foreign Secretary, Jack Straw, said the inquiry would examine any discrepancies between the intelligence available to the Government before the war and the findings of ISG.

It would work in cooperation with the U.S. inquiry on the issue and with the ISG; and would give its report to the Prime Min-

ister before the summer recess. The decision has been dubbed a 'U-turn' by the Government which had until now consistently maintained that there was no need for an inquiry as the search for weapons was still on.

Observers pointed out that Mr. Blair had been forced to "fall in line" as a result of intense pressure on him following the U.S. Government's decision to investigate its own intelligence claims after Dr. Kay's remarks.

Britons trash Hutton report

The Guardian & Agencies
London, January 30

THE YOUNG poll for the *Daily Telegraph* found that the majority of Britons - 56 per cent - think the inquiry which probed the suicide of arms expert David Kelly and exonerated Prime Minister Tony Blair was a "whitewash".

The survey revealed that despite Hutton's inquiry rapping the BBC for a faulty story on Iraqi WMDs, 67 per cent of respondents trust the BBC to tell the truth compared with 31 per cent who trusted the government.

Another parallel survey by ICM for *The Guardian* shows three times as many people trust the BBC to tell the truth than trust the government, despite Lord Hutton's damning judgment. Significantly, the survey reveals that confidence in both has been shattered. Almost half of those surveyed said they trusted neither.

In a sign that Blair has failed to achieve a "bounce" from the Hutton report, *The Guardian* survey also found a six-point drop in support for the Iraq war to less than half of voters. Opinion on the war in Iraq was equally divided, with 47 per cent saying it was justified. The Prime Minister's net personal rating was minus 17 points, with 55 per cent of voters

unhappy with his performance compared with 38 per cent expressing satisfaction. This compared with a net rating of minus 15 points a week ago. The survey, which polled 532 adults hours after the publication of Hutton's report, shows just one in 10 had faith in Blair's team compared with 31 per cent who trusted the BBC.

In a sign of the challenge facing Downing Street, as it tries to improve relations with the Labour Party in the wake of the fiasco over university top-up fees, the *Guardian* poll reveals that 17 per cent of Labour voters trust the government to tell the truth, compared with a quarter of respondents who trust the BBC.

Greg Dyke may be encouraged to learn that more people believe Tony Blair should have been the one to resign - 37 per cent, compared with 35 per cent who said Dyke should go. Nearly a quarter of Labour voters believe Blair should quit, a figure which rises to 39 per cent when the question was asked about Dyke.

Nearly half believe that Andrew Gilligan, whose report triggered the row, should be the first to go. Next in line is Geoff Hoon, the defence secretary, whose head is demanded by 41 per cent of voters though he was cleared by Hutton. He is followed by Gavyn Davies (38 per cent) who re-

signed as BBC chairman.

A third poll for *The Times* found that despite Hutton's exoneration, Blair had been damaged about as much as the BBC by the Kelly affair - 36 per cent now felt less favourable towards the PM and 34 per cent less favourable to the BBC, according to the Populus survey of 500 adults.

However, more than two-thirds - 69 per cent - said regardless of whether or not Iraq possessed WMDs, the war was justified because it led to Saddam Hussein's ouster.

Dyke has misgivings

BBC chief Greg Dyke, who resigned on Friday, has said he did "not necessarily" accept the inquiry's findings. "I could not quite work out what they had apologised for," said Dyke, after the BBC bowed to pressure from Blair and unconditionally apologised for alleging that intelligence on Iraq was "sexed up".

Amid accusations that Hutton's report was a "whitewash" of the government, Dyke suggested he may shortly voice his criticism. Hundreds of BBC employees protested at Dyke's resignation at the BBC's office here on Friday, calling for him to remain.

No WMDs, but hunt on for Peace Nobel

BUSH AND Blair are among nominees for the 2004 Nobel Peace Prize before a Sunday deadline for nominations despite their failure to find WMDs in Iraq.

"Nominations are pouring in," said Geir Lundestad, director of the Norwegian Nobel Institute. He said he gets up to 1,500 e-mails a day from people either supporting or denouncing candidates.

The European Union - to mark its expansion into the former East Bloc - the Pope, Salvation Army, Vaclav Havel and Chinese dissidents are among nominees.

"Bush and Blair definitely still deserve it," said Jan Simonsen, a right-wing independent member of Norway's parliament who nominated the two for the 2004 prize after Saddam was toppled. "Even though they haven't found those weapons they got rid of a madman."

But Nobel-watchers say Bush or Blair's chances are close to nil. The 2002 prize went to Jimmy Carter, who argued against war. The head of the Nobel committee called the choice a "kick in the legs" to Bush on Iraq. There are no obvious favourites for the \$1.35-m 2004 prize.

Reuters, Oslo

THE REAL QUESTIONS 311

It is England, after all. The murkiest of things — lies, betrayals, suicide, inquiries, resignations, even war and its aftermath — must happen impeccably. Lord Hutton has spoken. Mr Tony Blair and his men are clean; nobody could have known that David Kelly would kill himself; and the BBC must mend its ways. Nothing could have been better for Mr Blair, and worse for the BBC. These twinned outcomes are reflected in the fact that the run-up to the fateful renewal of the BBC's charter coincides with the run-up to a general election. But, for the moment, decency must prevail. Lord Hutton has questioned the BBC's editorial system and standards of management. Therefore, not only have its chairman and director general resigned in quick succession, but the acting chairman has also apologized "unreservedly" for the BBC's errors of judgement. Mr Blair now considers the accusations against him withdrawn. So he wants to "draw a line and move on".

But faith has never been purely a matter of judicial evidence. So lines cannot be drawn as promptly and as neatly as the prime minister would like to imagine. England has a vibrant civil society, which likes to think and judge for itself. And this indomitable body sees the nation's standards of democratic accountability compromised on some vital counts. With the Hutton report's indictment of the BBC, those who value the legendary editorial independence of this "public service broadcaster" have begun to fear that nothing less than this fiercely guarded autonomy might be at stake now. The BBC has held its own against the government

throughout its eighty-odd years. Through World War II, the Suez crisis and the Falklands war, it has taken on Winston Churchill, Anthony Eden and Ms Margaret Thatcher respectively. But Mr Blair and the Iraq war seem to have landed it in a crisis of what looks like rudderless panic.

Like the protests and demonstrations all over Britain among BBC employees, following the resignations, recent polls show that three times as many people still prefer to place their trust in the BBC than in Mr Blair's government. More people believe that he should have resigned rather than the BBC's top men. Lord Hutton has cleared Mr Blair on the matters that he had been specifically asked to look into. He has repeatedly reminded the public of the narrowness of his remit, of what does not fall within the "terms of his reference". But outside this judicial boundary lies a vast grey area, of dubious actions and complex truths. In this wider and darker arena, nothing seems to have been resolved at all.

It will be difficult for Lord Hutton to deflect public attention from the questions that remain about why and how England went to war

And much larger, more disturbing questions of why and how England went to war remain unanswered. Mr Blair may not have lied, but are not gullibility and misjudgement with regard to intelligence just as culpable? Why does Lord Hutton have to quibble on the double meaning of "sexing up", and then choose the meaning that serves the government best? Why does he have to invoke the "subconscious" to talk about Mr Blair's influence on the joint intelligence committee? It will be difficult for this establishment law-lord to deflect public attention from the only question that should, and still does, really matter: why then did England go to war?

THE TELEGRAPH

31 JAN 2004

BOARD HOLDS CRISIS TALKS ■ MEDIA RAPS INQUIRY REPORT AS 'WHITEWASH'

BBC governors apologise, D-G resigns

Agencies

LONDON, Jan. 29. — A day after Gavyn Davies stood down as chairman of the BBC, the Hutton report today claimed its second scalp when its director-general Greg Dyke resigned.

In a statement, the BBC also unreservedly apologised over the errors in a report alleging that Prime Minister Tony Blair's government doctored intelligence on Iraq.

Mr Blair accepted the apology. "This for me has always been a very simple matter of an accusation, a very serious one that was made, that was a false accusation as Lord Hutton found. It has now been withdrawn. That is all I ever wanted," the prime minister said.

Speaking on the steps of Broadcasting House, Dyke



WEATHERING THE STORM: An employee leaves the BBC offices on Portland Place in London after the release of the Hutton Report lead to the resignation of BBC chairman Mr Gavyn Davies. (Right) Mr Davies. — AFP

said: "With the departure of Gavyn and myself and the apology I issued on behalf of the BBC yesterday, I hope that a line can be drawn under this whole episode... Throughout this whole affair my sole aim as director general of the BBC has been to defend our editorial independence and act in the public

interest... I think my going is very important in preserving the BBC's editorial independence."

Although Mr Dyke was director general and editor-in-chief of the BBC, he was not a journalist and did not direct its news operations.

The decision emerged this afternoon after the remaining governors gathered at Broadcasting House in central London for crisis talks.

Lord Ryder, the BBC's acting chairman, said after the meeting: "On behalf of the BBC I have no hesitation in apologising unreservedly for our errors and to the individuals whose reputations were affected by them."

"The appointment of director-general is solely a matter for the BBC's board of governors. Both roles are essential to a strong and independent

BBC and it is important that the vacancies created by the departure of Gavyn Davies and Greg Dyke are filled as soon as possible and with due care.

When Davies had resigned, he questioned some of Hutton's findings concerning the death of David Kelly, the weapons scientist who committed suicide after being caught up in a row between the BBC and the government about its case for war in Iraq. Hutton vindicated Prime Minister Tony Blair, while criticising the broadcaster.

Mr Blair had demanded an apology from the BBC, but Mr Dyke defended the "greater part" of the story that sparked a bitter row with the Prime Minister's office. Earlier today, Mr Blair's spokesman repeated calls for the broadcaster to apologise. "We still want an apology. The BBC should

apologise for broadcasting a false allegation," he said. Many British newspapers expressed surprise over what they called a one-sided Hutton judgment. "Whitewash?" asked the *Independent* in its main headline — printed in red against a white front page.

In the conservative *Daily Mail*, columnist Max Hastings said Hutton "fails to set his story in the context of the BBC's huge virtues and Labour's sore vices".

Most agreed Mr Blair had been utterly vindicated by Hutton of charges he lied about the threat posed by Iraq, with one tabloid calling him "Saint Tony" in a front-page headline.

The BBC has so far declined to say whether it will take any action against defence correspondent Andrew Gilligan, who made the criticised broadcast.

BBC's darkest hour, whitewash stains Blair

AMIT ROY

London, Jan. 29: Civilisation as the British know it is coming to an end, with the BBC facing the gravest crisis in its history and its director general, Greg Dyke, resigning today, only hours after the departure last night of its chairman, Gavyn Davies.

Tony Blair and his government, who were cleared yesterday by Lord Hutton of any wrongdoing over the death of Dr David Kelly, the weapons scientist, are not having things all their own way, though.

An influential and growing body of opinion believes that Hutton's report is a "whitewash" — in fact, today's *Independent* newspaper dramatically left most of its front page blank to signal its view that Hutton has not been even-handed in apportioning blame.

Hutton said that the allegation by the BBC reporter, Andrew Gilligan, that the government had "sexed up" its Iraq dossier was "unfounded" and also characterised the BBC's editorial and management system as "defective".

Today, after a meeting of the BBC's board of governors, an emotional Dyke stood outside the front door of Broadcasting House clutching a sheaf of e-mails from his staff begging him to stay.

With his resignation and that of the chairman, he said he hoped "a line would be drawn" under the whole affair and that the BBC would have the opportunity for a "new start".

He added that as the man at the top he had to take responsibility.

Blair and his former chief spokesman, Alastair Campbell, are calling for the BBC to issue an apology to the government.



Greg Dyke, who quit as BBC director general, is surrounded by supporting employees at the Television Centre headquarters in White City, London. (Reuters)

What is ironic is that when Davies and Dyke first got their jobs, they were described as Labour-supporting government plants — "Tony's cronies".

At issue now is the freedom and independence of the BBC. It has admitted it made a mistake over Gilligan but insists it was right to cover the Iraq war in the way that it did — which is one of the reasons why Blair and Campbell went to war against the BBC.

In 2006, the BBC's charter, which sets out the way the BBC is run, is up for a review to be conducted by the government's department today that he thought the Hutton

of culture and media.

"My sole aim has been to defend the BBC's editorial independence and act in the public interest," said Dyke, who is being succeeded for the time being by his deputy, Mark Byford, a former director of BBC World Service radio.

If anything, the row is likely to grow, with many people openly questioning whether Hutton's report can be reconciled with the evidence that he has heard. One trenchant commentator, the novelist Frederick Forsyth, said today that he thought the Hutton

report was "garbage".

Although Hutton is still considered an eminent judge, with long experience in northern Ireland, an opinion poll commissioned today by the *London Evening Standard* found more people believe it was unfair than fair for the BBC to receive most of the blame for the Kelly affair in the Hutton report.

A former chairman of the BBC, Sir Christopher Bland, said while the BBC should accept it made mistakes, it was legitimate to ask if the law lord's treatment had been balanced.

"It seems to me that he whitewashed the government and maybe he was right to do that," said Sir Christopher, who was succeeded by Gavyn Davies. "But he tarred and feathered the BBC and there just seems to be a real imbalance in his treatment."

While the *Independent* used the word "Whitewash" on page one, the sober *Financial Times*, commented that Hutton's verdict took the political world by surprise.

It said that contrast between the law lord's castigation of the BBC and his acquittal of the government was so great that the corporation started to question the basis on which he had made his judgment.

The BBC is today in the curious position of having to report its own troubles — which it is doing rather well with its camera crews and reporters doorstepping its outgoing director general.

The face of Andrew Marr, the BBC's high profile political editor, looked drained of all colour as he commented on the departure of his own boss. No one has the faintest idea who the new director general or chairman are going to be.

SANDRA LAVILLE AND MICHAEL SMITH

London, Jan. 29: Huge areas of controversy that went to the heart of the government's motivation in its dealings with David Kelly and the reliability of the intelligence used to justify war against Iraq were left unexamined by Lord Hutton.

The law lord declined to consider whether the intelligence in the government's dossier was of sufficient strength to justify the statement that Saddam Hussein's regime posed such a threat to British interests that military action should be taken.

He also refused to pass judgment on the reliability of the intelligence in the dossier. Even within his narrow role as a quasi coroner examining the circumstances surrounding Kelly's death, Hutton appears to have avoided many areas raised as controversial in the inquiry.

Kelly's family, in their written submissions which were published yesterday, claim there was on the government's part a "conscious decision to cause Kelly's identity to be revealed".

Hutton dismisses this. But he appears in his report not to have considered what the family claims is compelling evidence of this in the diaries of Alastair Campbell. They cite as an example the not considered in

Hutton's report this excerpt: "We kept pressing on as best we could at the briefings, but the biggest thing needed was the source out."

Another area that seems to have escaped comment by Hutton is evidence, the family says, which suggests Kelly was coached before his appearance before the foreign affairs select committee. This was, they said: "To ensure that Kelly did not say anything that might embarrass the government" and is more evidence of a deliberate strategy to use Kelly in the battle with the BBC.

Although Hutton accepted the findings of Prof Keith Hawton, an expert in suicide research, that Kelly killed himself as a result of a severe loss of self-esteem and a feeling that people had lost trust in him, he paid no heed to evidence that the MoD had belittled him.

They cite Sir Kevin Tebbit, the permanent secretary in the MoD, who admitted that he "slightly overdid" the "relatively junior point". Janice Kelly says this was deeply hurtful to her husband.

Much blame is placed by Hutton upon Kelly himself for breaching civil service guidelines when he talked to Gilligan. But the family say he has not considered the "hopelessly confused" arrangements within the foreign office and MoD defining these rules.

ments to the dossier do not merit deep analysis by Hutton because he refused to be drawn on the wider issues of the strength and reliability of the intelligence and whether it justified military action.

He dismisses one key area in which Jonathan Powell, Blair's chief of staff, appears fundamentally to change the nature of the threat Saddam Hussein poses, making it active rather than defensive.

Powell referred in a late e-mail to John Scarlett to a part of the dossier which said: "Saddam is prepared to use chemical and biological weapons (CBW), if he believes his regime is under threat."

This was "a bit of a problem", Powell said. "It backs up the argument that there is no CBW threat and we will only create one if we attack him. I think you should redraft the paragraph."

Scarlett agreed to redraft it to make the threat active — without consulting the joint intelligence committee. When asked why, he told Hutton that he had the authority to do so and there was intelligence to back it up. Hutton unquestioningly accepted his evidence. The "new" intelligence was never made public to the inquiry.

The law lord also never considered other areas of change in the dossier.

Lord Hutton simply refused to tread on territory that would discomfit Tony Blair

Establishment whitewash

Wk 10 11/11/04

BY JONATHAN FREEDLAND

A SOFT snowfall was swirling outside the high court just before Lord Hutton took his place on the bench. It's a pity it did not last, because a blanket of fresh, white snow would have made the perfect backdrop to what followed: an extraordinary one-man show, a performance which had its audience snorting and occasionally gasping in disbelief. Transferred to the West End, the show could only have one name: Whitewash.

For six months the government had been accused of the darkest of crimes: leading the nation to war on a lie and bullying a dedicated public servant to his death. In 90 minutes Lord Hutton crushed those claims entirely. He exonerated Tony Blair, Alastair Campbell, Geoff Hoon, John Scarlett and Kevin Tebbit more completely than any of them can have dreamed.

As theatre, the show may have lacked visual splendour: just a modern, Ikea-blond wood courtroom with a white-haired judge at its apex, hunched over his text, reading aloud in his gentle Ulster brogue. But what it lacked in set design and costume it more than made up in narrative drive. The Hutton report had no confusing ambiguities or detours. It all thrust in the same, clear direction: the government was right and the BBC was wrong. (Downing Street, which along with all the parties involved in the Kelly affair had received the report 24 hours earlier, must have begun the day with a champagne breakfast. Once Lord Hutton had spoken, officials could barely contain their gratitude. One Labour apparatchik exclaimed: "Make that man a duke!")

Occasionally, his lordship tantalised with a hint of suspense. He would begin a sentence that seemed destined to hurt the government — only to swerve away with a "however" or "nevertheless" that backed the prime minister or his aides.

A classic of the form came when the judge assessed whether there had been an "underhand strategy" to name David Kelly. "For a time, at the start of the inquiry, it appeared to me that a case of some strength could be made that there was such a strategy..." he began. Perhaps now the drama was about to turn!

But no. He explained that the longer the inquiry proceeded, and the more he heard government wit-



GETTING AWAY BY THE SKIN OF HIS TEETH: Tony Blair

nesses explain themselves, the more his mild scepticism melted away. He concluded "that there was no such underhand strategy".

The judge faulted the ministry of defence for the way it told Kelly he had been outed. Otherwise, the closest Lord Hutton came to laying a glove on the government was his suggestion that "the possibility cannot be completely ruled out" that the PM's desire to have a strong dossier on Iraqi weapons of mass destruction had "subconsciously influenced" John Scarlett and his joint intelligence committee.

Subconsciously! Forget all those memos from Campbell to the intelligence chief asking for multiple changes in wording. There was no pressure to harden the dossier, Lord Hutton decided, just a possible twitch of Scarlett's subconscious — and even that tiny "possibility" was remote. It was more likely that Scarlett's sole concern had been to reflect accurately the intelligence available.

Often when judges hand down their judgments, the lesser mortals arrayed below feel compelled to put aside their own biases or expectations and bow to the sheer logic and coherence of the legal argument. Whatever their final conclusions, long, detailed rulings in high-profile cases are often spellbinding essays in tight, rigorous reasoning. Yesterday was not one of those days. Observers who had sat through every hour of the Hutton inquiry, reading

and hearing the same evidence as his lordship, were left scratching their heads at his final thinking.

For one thing, Lord Hutton seemed to have turned a deaf ear to crucial facts and testimony. Transcripts of interviews that the BBC *Newsnight* journalist, Susan Watts, had recorded with Kelly corroborated much of what Gilligan claimed, not least the scientist's statement that the 45-minute claim was "got out of all proportion". But Lord Hutton appears to have put those transcripts out of his mind, preferring to assume that Kelly could not have said what Gilligan claimed he had.

The judge further chose to believe there was no "underhand strategy" to name Kelly, gliding over Campbell's diary entries in which he confessed his desperation to get the scientist's name out. Lord Hutton concluded there was no leaking, even though newspaper reports from last summer show someone must have been pointing reporters very directly towards Kelly.

He ruled there had been no meddling with the substance of the September dossier, just some beefing up of language, even though one expert witness, Brian Jones, testified that, when it comes to intelligence, wording is substance.

On each element of the case before him, Lord Hutton opted for the interpretation that most favoured the government, never countenancing the gloss that might benefit the

BBC. Perhaps the clearest example was Lord Hutton's very judge-like deconstruction of the 'slang expression' sexed up. One meaning could be inserting items that are untrue, he said; another could simply be strengthening language. Under the latter definition, Hutton conceded, Gilligan's story would be true. So his lordship decided the other meaning must apply.

The judge also seemed to have a bad case of Wandering Remit Syndrome. The late insertion of the notorious 45-minute claim was within the scope of his inquiry; but whether that claim related to battlefield or strategic weapons was not, even though the reliability of the claim might well turn on precisely that question. Repeatedly, territory that might discomfit the government was declared out of bounds; areas awkward for the BBC were very much in.

The whole performance set you wondering. For this has become a ritual in our national life. If an argument rages on long enough, we soon call for a judge to investigate it for us in the form of a public inquiry. We see and hear the same evidence he does, but still we invest in him some mystical power to reach a conclusive truth we have not seen. And eventually he comes down from the mountain, like the high priest of yore, and delivers his judgment.

Yesterday's show shattered that illusion. Suddenly you found yourself seeing through the grandeur and mystique and wondering, who exactly is this man? Why was he chosen for this task? What made him cast this whole, complex dispute so neatly in black and white?

Yesterday was a reminder that these people are human beings like any other. It seems worth remembering that, before he was a law lord, the judge was plain Brian Hutton. That man might just harbour an old-fashioned faith in the benign motives of government and establishment and may, for all we know, take a dim view of journalism.

In a generation's time, perhaps, we will have lost our need to ask a single, bewigged man to separate truth from lies in public life. Yesterday such questions were far away, as the government crowed and the BBC bowed its head — and the snow kept on falling.

The Guardian

9 JAN 2004

Hutton clears Blair, BBC chairman to quit

Associated Press

LONDON, Jan. 28. — A senior British judge today said Mr Tony Blair's government did not act in a "dishonorable, underhand or duplicitous" way in its handling of a British expert on Iraqi weapons who committed suicide.

BBC chairman Mr Gavin Davies is to resign in the wake of appeals judge Lord Brian Hutton's criticisms of the BBC's reports that the government "sewed up" its dossier on Iraq's weapons.

BBC political editor

Andrew Marr today announced in BBC's main television channel that Mr Davies would be submitting his resignation soon to his fellow members of the BBC board of governors.

Just ahead of the announcement, BBC chief executive Mr Greg Dykes, in a pre-recorded statement, apologised for errors in the 29 May report, and added that BBC governors would meet formally tomorrow to review Lord Hutton's findings.

The BBC does accept that certain key allegations reported by Andrew Gilligan on the *Today* programme

exonerate Mr Blair after the biggest crisis of his seven years in office. The BBC report had challenged his integrity and the case he had made for British forces joining the war against Iraq.

Lord Hutton sharply criticised the publicly funded BBC's "defective" handling of BBC reporter Andrew Gilligan's story, saying the network's editors had failed to properly check his allegations and did not properly investigate the government's complaints about his report.

Lord Hutton criticised the BBC governors for

failing to make their own detailed investigation to discover whether Gilligan's notes supported his report. "If they'd had done this, they would probably have discovered that the notes did not support the allegation that the government probably knew that the 45 minutes claim was probably wrong."

He criticised the board "for failing to give proper and adequate consideration to whether the BBC should publicly acknowledge that this very grave allegation should not have been broadcast".

The BBC report had

claimed that a government statement that Iraqi forces could deploy weapons of mass destruction within 45 minutes was based on false intelligence that officials knew was unreliable.

Lord Hutton said the government acted "reasonably" in confirming Kelly's identity after he told his superiors he was probably the source of Gilligan's story. Kelly, however, denied telling Gilligan that the 45-minute claim was false.

The judge said the government would have been guilty of a cover up if it had tried to conceal



Lord Hutton (left) said the government acted 'reasonably' in confirming Kelly's identity and it was not part of a 'dishonorable or underhand strategy in order to assist the government in its battle with the BBC'

decision by Lord Hutton after gathering months of evidence regarding the death of weapons expert David Kelly appeared to

Judge mulls legal action

LONDON, Jan. 28. — Lord Hutton today said he is considering "investigative and legal action" against *The Sun* daily newspaper after it published his conclusions just hours before he made them public. — AFP

Kelly's identity. "The issuing of the statement was not part of a dishonorable or underhand or duplicitous strategy to leak Dr. Kelly's name covertly in order to assist the government in its battle with the BBC."

29 JAN 2004

Blair cleared, BBC chief quits

WFO
 23/11/04

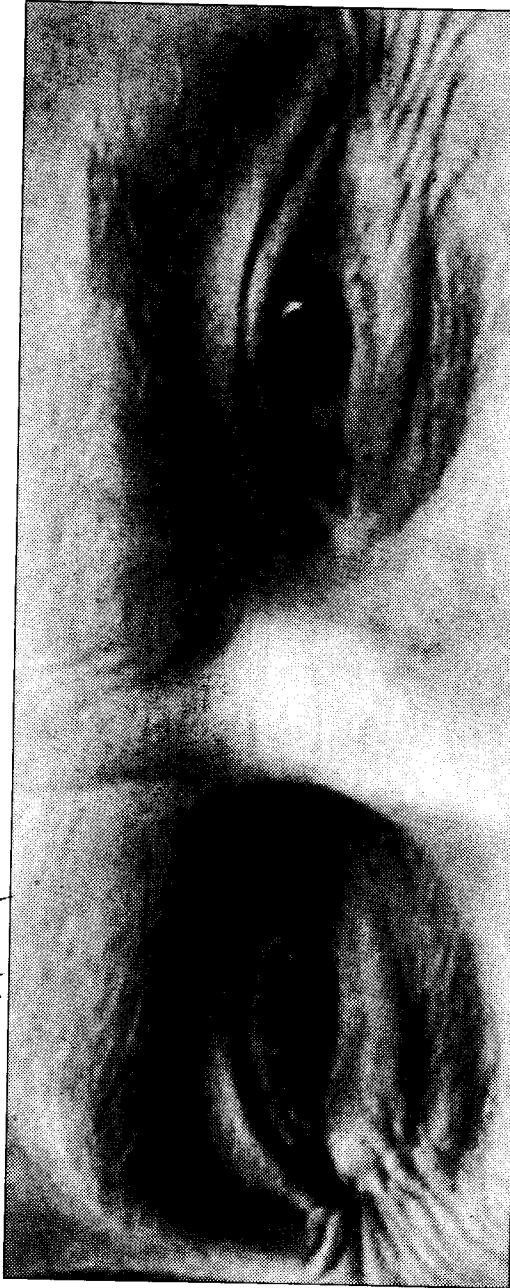
The Guardian
 London, January 28

LORD HUTTON on Wednesday gave full backing to the government's conduct in the David Kelly affair, but accused the BBC of "defective" editorial management.

In a major relief to Prime Minister Tony Blair, the judge inquiring into the death of David Kelly cleared his government of any direct involvement in the suicide of the weapons inspector to Iraq and instead castigated BBC for its report that intelligence on Iraq was "sexed up".

Within hours of publication of the report, Gavin Davies, chairman of the BBC board of governors, resigned and the broadcaster apologised for some of its reporting on the buildup to the war. "BBC does accept that certain key allegations reported by Andrew Gilligan on *Today* programme on May 29 last year were wrong and we apologise for them," BBC Director General Greg Dyke said.

Judge Brian Hutton in his 328-page report said that he was satisfied that Dr Kelly had killed himself after being named as the suspected



REUTERS

READ MY EYES: British Prime Minister Tony Blair leaving the House of Commons in London on Wednesday.

source of the BBC's controversial weapons' dossier story. The claim in BBC reports that the government "sexed up" its dossier on WMDs before the US invasion last March was "unfounded".

In a one and three-quarter hour summary, delivered at the High Court, the judge ran through the sequence of events from the writing of the September '02 dossier and ending with Kelly's suicide.

The law Lord said the BBC's management had failed to appreciate that reporter Gilligan's notes did not support the most serious of his allegations. He added that governors should have recognised and investigated the differences between them.

Lord Hutton accused Alastair Campbell of "raising the temperature" of the row by the tone of his complaints. But he added that the go-

vernors should have recognised that their legitimate desire to protect the BBC's independence was not incompatible with investigating those complaints.

Lord Hutton said that the dossier's 45-minute claim may be proved to be wrong in the future, but that Gilligan's allegation that the government knew that it was wrong when the dossier was published was "unfounded" be-

cause intelligence chiefs believed its source was reliable. He described Gilligan's report as a "grave" slur on the government's integrity.

Earlier in his statement, the law Lord said he was "satisfied that Dr Kelly had taken his own life by cutting his left wrist". His death had been hastened by a "concoction" of pills, said the judge. He added that no third party had been involved.

Blair wants his job till 2010

UKO
SF-3

2/1/04

Press Trust of India



LONDON, Jan. 1. — In a stern warning to his detractors in the party, the British Prime Minister, Mr Tony Blair, today asserted that he intends to remain as Prime Minister until at least 2010 because his job of transforming the country into a leader among world nations is only “half done”.

In a New Year Message, he also said the “tough decisions” taken on Iraq and public service reform are starting to pay off. “I remain as committed, as optimistic and as determined as I was in 1997 to complete the task,” he said.

Noting that Britain was poised to become one of 21st century’s most successful nations “but is not there yet,” Mr Blair said: “There is no time to turn the clock back, no time to coast, no time to falter with the job only half done.” “I relish the challenge ahead and I

am confident that in partnership — government and people — we can take the next important steps forward in 2004.” His defiant tone suggested that despite health problems and battles with his party during 2003, which led to speculation that he might quit, Mr Blair has no short-term plans to hand over the reins to Chancellor Gordon Brown.

With the biggest Labour rebellion since he came to office building up over university “top up” fees, Blair made clear he had no intention of giving ground to rebel MPs. He conceded that the issue of how to fund higher education was “difficult” but said he was convinced that his arguments would win the day.

We either have a fair contribution from students or we deny opportunities for hundreds of thousands by cutting university number, or we raise taxes for everyone, including the majority who have not benefited from the higher earning power of higher education.

THE HINDU

21 JAN 2004

Blair admits doubts over WMD in Iraq

11-10
18/1/04
By Rashmee Z. Ahmed
TIMES NEWS NETWORK



Tony Blair

London: British Prime Minister Tony Blair has admitted he does not know if weapons of mass destruction (WMD) will ever be found in Iraq.

Mr Blair's first public admission of doubt over the central reason for the US-UK invasion of Baghdad comes within hours of similar statements from a former aide to US President George W. Bush in Washington. Mr Blair's doubtful words are thought to be the US-UK military alliance's highest-level scaling down of public expectation over WMD.

Asked by BBC's veteran interviewer David Frost when WMD would be discovered, Mr Blair replied candidly, if in calculated downbeat mode: "I do not know the answer. You can't be definitive at the moment about what has happened."

He agreed the marked delay in finding any WMD in Iraq flew in the face of public expectation worldwide. "I agree there were many people who thought we were going after this (WMD) in the course of the actual (military) operation."

Just hours after Mr Blair's remarkable admission of doubt over Saddam's arsenal, similar comments were heard from Washington, only this time from a former Bush advisor, known to be em-

bittered after being sacked from his job.

Former US treasury secretary Paul O'Neill, who was once on Bush's National Security team and is now known to be flogging a book to the reading public, announced that he (O'Neill) never saw any evidence of Iraqi WMD. Instead, he said, Mr Bush had been gunning for Saddam since the day he took office.

Mr O'Neill's comments became big news in a Britain, already sceptical about WMD. Analysts said Mr Blair's admission and Mr O'Neill's rather vindictive comments marked a stark contrast with the bullish assertion from both capitals before the war that Saddam was capable of launching a WMD attack within 45 minutes.

In a sign that WMD might become too hot to handle for a politically vulnerable Mr Blair, the main opposition, the Conservative Party, said that it raised very serious questions. Former Labour minister Glenda Jackson, an outspoken critic of the war, said Mr Blair appeared "no longer to believe his own arguments".

But Mr Blair, who tried to retain the moral high ground on Iraq, insisted he had been right to act on intelligence about WMD. "In a land mass twice the size of the UK it may well not be surprising you don't find where this stuff (WMD) is hidden," he said.

And he appeared to cling to the admittedly slender news available from the scientists currently trawling through Iraq as part of the Iraq Survey Group.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

13 JAN 2004

US fingerprints and shakes hands

Atlanta, Jan. 5 (Reuters): The US began fingerprinting and photographing visitors from most countries today in a controversial programme to try to prevent potential terrorists from slipping in through the borders.

The programme was launched at 115 airports and 14 cruise ship ports across the country, but not yet at land borders, which account for a large part of traffic into the US.

Tourists and business travellers on short visits from 27 mostly European nations are exempt from the new measures. Canadians, who fall under special immigration rules, are also exempt. Some foreign nationals have complained of discrimination and Brazil last week began fingerprinting and photographing all arriving US citizens.

Federal officials said the measures, which were ordered by Congress in response to the September 11, 2001, hijacked plane attacks, would tighten security without causing any undue inconvenience to travellers. "It is easy for travellers to use, but hard for terrorists to avoid," department of homeland security secretary Tom Ridge told a news conference at Atlanta's international airport shortly after the system began.

Ridge greeted and shook



A reporter's finger on a fingerprinting machine at JFK airport in New York. (AFP)

ger airport, with an average of 2,400 flights arriving and departing daily.

The new fingerprinting and photographing programme is meant to identify people who have violated immigration controls, have criminal records or belong to groups listed as terrorist organisations by the US.

At Miami International Airport, which receives a large part of passenger traffic from Latin America and the Caribbean, passengers interviewed after going through the process said they had no problem with the...

to hide, it shouldn't be a problem. I wasn't offended." But the Brazilian fingerprint programme of US visitors that began last Thursday came on the orders of a judge who angrily compared the new US controls to Nazi horrors.

Airport alarm

Armed police patrolled airport terminals and aviation authorities were on high alert today after several international flights were grounded last week amid fears of another September...

Saddam brings back 'Osama'

Dubai, Jan. 5 (Reuters): The Arabic television channel Al Jazeera aired an audio tape yesterday purported to be from al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden in which he mentioned the arrest of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein by US troops last month. Saddam was captured on December 13.

A CIA analysis found that the tape is "likely" the voice of Osama bin Laden, a CIA official said today. "After conducting a technical analysis, the CIA's assessment is that it is likely bin Laden's voice," the CIA official said on condition of anonymity.

In Washington, a CIA spokesman said it might take a couple of days to determine whether the tape, which sounded like previous broadcast recordings by the al Qaeda leader, was genuine.

The voice said Muslim and Arab leaders had reason to fear the precedent of letting foreigners topple a Muslim government, "especially after they saw the capture of their former comrade in treachery and collaboration with America" — meaning Saddam.

The recording, which rambled like a sermon between a myriad of topics, urged Muslims to fight US occupation forces in Iraq and criticised Gulf Arab governments for supporting Washington's invasion of an Arab country. It said the fall of Baghdad would be a precursor to a US occupation of Saudi Arabia and other oil-rich Gulf Arab states. "There should be no dialogue with the occupiers except with arms, and this is what we should strive for," the voice said.

"The West is trying to kill whoever carries the banner of Islam under the pretence of combating terrorism because they all know that jihad (holy struggle) is the effective power to foil all their conspiracies... Gulf Arab states know that their turn (for a US invasion) is coming and they don't have the will to make the difficult decision from the aggression."

WK (U)
H.A.M.

Blair calls on troops in Iraq to say 'thank you'

SF-3
5/11/04

Associated Press

BASRA (Iraq), Jan. 4. — British Prime Minister Mr Tony Blair, the main US ally in Iraq, made a surprise visit to the southern city of Basra today to thank British troops for their part in the war.

Mr Blair, whose political fortunes have wavered due to his support for US President Mr George W Bush, flew into Iraq's second-largest city by military aircraft from the Egyptian Red Sea resort of Sharm el-Sheik, where he was on vacation with his family.

During the day-long visit, he was scheduled to meet military commanders and give a speech to some of the 10,000 British troops stationed in and around Basra.

He started with a visit to a new police academy in the small town of Az Zubayr, where he watched Iraqi officers being trained in self defence, then talked and shook hands with British police officers and military personnel from Britain, Denmark, the Czech Republic and Italy.

In gray trousers, a blue shirt and a navy jacket, Mr Blair made the 10-minute flight to the academy from Basra



Mr Tony Blair walks past a British soldier teaching an Iraqi police cadet hand-to-hand combat at the Police Academy in Basra on Sunday. — AFP

in a British Army Air Corps Chinook helicopter, guarded by rear and side machine gunners.

Mr Blair last visited British troops in Basra in May 2003. His latest trip

follows President Bush's surprise Thanksgiving Day visit on 27 Nov 2003 to Baghdad and a visit by Spanish Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar on 20 December 2003.

THE STANDARD

5 JAN 2004